



# Quasi-Realism: A Defence

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## Preface

“Blackburn’s project is a sustained and highly ingenious attempt to steal the realist’s clothes. Does he succeed in stealing all of them? Do they fit?” (McNaughton, 1988, p. 186)

My task is to answer both questions above. I answer them in what someone might suggest is an infuriatingly philosophical way; that is, I say “yes, almost”. My aim is to justify quasi-realism and to argue that it successfully answers the objections aimed at it. Given, however, that a PhD thesis can only be so long, I’ve selected certain problems and not dealt with others. My hope is that this will not be remiss. Rather, it’ll allow for a richer analysis of the challenges for quasi-realism than would be on offer had I attempted to answer every problem the programme faces. I also hope that my thesis will, by having established my theory ideal quasi-realism, allow me to develop it further in the future with a keen eye on solving the remaining problems faced by the quasi-realist.

The problems I’ve selected all have a common theme, but it is one common to all philosophy: “is there logical space for x theory?”. For the quasi-realist the question is particularly tricky to answer because objections against it come from two sides: first, from those who think quasi-realism is not anti-realist enough, and second, from those who think it is not realist enough. The aim of quasi-realism is to explain and justify our ‘realist’ sounding moral discourse, if quasi-realism fails to be realist or anti-realist enough, then it fails to achieve its aim. It cannot be so realist that it no longer holds true to its expressivist roots. Nor can it be so anti-realist that it utterly fails to explain moral truth and moral

authority by its own lights. It must sit, carefully, in the middle, and carve out space with delicate precision.

I've chosen five challenges for the quasi-realist. Each one addresses a feature the quasi-realist must accommodate on their theory. The first chapter – The Moral Attitude Problem – explores first whether the quasi-realist has to solve such a problem at all. I argue that it is crucial to the success of the programme that a solution is provided. This chapter serves to give a detailed account of what a moral attitude is. In doing so, the chapter explores broader problems for metaethics like the moral and aesthetic distinction, and I show that the quasi-realist can successfully make this distinction if she adopts the theory I defend – ideal quasi-realism.

In the second chapter, The Fundamental Error Chapter, I offer two readings of Simon Blackburn's view of stability. I argue that both Egan and Köhler read Blackburn as holding a strong stability view, when really he holds an antecedent stability view. I argue that his antecedent stability view, which should be read as splitting stability into narrow stability - which includes only idle possibilities for improvement - and wide antecedent stability - which includes only real possibilities for improvement - sheds light on how the quasi-realist can answer the fundamental error problem. I consider why we should not accept Blackburn's reply to Egan, arguing that the reply removes admiration as a key feature of the quasi-realist story.

I argue that by doing this Blackburn will struggle to make sense of the difference between an improvement and a change. Further, I apply the wide and narrow understanding of stability to both Egan and Köhler's arguments, showing why reading Blackburn to be advancing this view allows him to escape the two iterations of the fundamental error problem that they raise. Lastly I consider some problems for this approach, most importantly, the worry that the fundamental

error problem can simply be reapplied again. I offer a tentative suggestion that ideal quasi-realism can solve the problem.

In the third chapter I turn to the problem of relativism. I argue that a revised relativism problem can be advanced against Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism. I argue that our ordinary moral discourse, which quasi-realism seeks to explain and justify, includes features like sincerity, moral authority, and a judgement being better than another.

I claim that if these features are a part of moral discourse, then the quasi-realist must respond to relativism problems. If she does not, then her philosophical programme fails. I argue that Blackburn's response to two forms of the relativism objection which I call Narrow Truth Relativism and Broad Equality Relativism fail. Nor, I argue, do his replies successfully defend the quasi-realist against the revised relativism objection which argues that the quasi-realist must give a metaethical and not a first order reply to Broad Equality Relativism problems. Finally, I argue for my own theory, ideal quasi-realism, which offers a solution to the revised relativism problem.

In the fourth chapter I turn to the problem of metaethical neutrality. I deal with two different versions of metaethical neutrality and as such I've split the chapter into two parts.

In part one I consider David Enoch's argument against the quasi-realist. I argue that his argument fails, and that the quasi-realist can accommodate the split between ethical and metaethical discourse which his conception of metaethical neutrality suggests.

I claim that his failure is bourn from a misunderstanding of how the quasi-realist cashes out moral judgements. He claims that the quasi-realist explains moral judgements in terms of preferences, but this, I argue, is not so. I argue that ideal quasi-realism can help explain

why metaethics and ethics are separate, and why preferences are not the same as stable attitudes.

In part two I argue that Dworkin's claim that quasi-realism collapses in on itself does not succeed. The problem, I claim, is that Dworkin fails to acknowledge the distinct function of morality versus the function of metaethics. First I show how we can make sense of this distinction, then I show how ideal quasi-realism can explain why there is no threat of collapse for the quasi-realist.

Finally, in the last chapter, I discuss Sharon Streets (2011) challenge that the quasi-realist cannot both remain a (broad) naturalist and accommodate the notion of independent normative truth as such. I argue that we should accept Blackburn and Gibbard's replies to Street which show why their notion of truth is not vast enough for her argument to go through. I then argue that despite this, Street still requires an explanation of independent normativity. I sketch an ideal quasi-realist explanation of independent normativity towards the end of the chapter.

Now that we have an outline of the main chapters of the thesis I will use the rest of this introductory chapter to give an overview of some of the key features of ethics, metaethics, and quasi-realism. I will begin the discussion with what the quasi-realist intends to explain: ethics. Then I will sketch a brief history of metaethics to help us understand where quasi-realism sits in the literature. Next I will discuss the main features of Blackburn's quasi-realism such as projectivism and stable moral attitudes. Finally I will discuss my own theory, ideal quasi-realism, and explain its similarities to and differences from, Blackburn's quasi-realism.



## Introduction

We make choices every day; we think about what we should do and whether we have the means to do it. We argue and disagree about our choices. Some of those choices are moral, and it is specifically the moral judgements we voice during those agreements and disagreements and the metaethics which explains the meaning of our moral judgements, which I am concerned with in this thesis. The ethics of our everyday lives is the ethics the quasi-realist is concerned with. At first blush, someone who overhears two philosophers arguing about metaethics might disagree that the philosopher is concerned with the same ethics as they are. They might surmise that metaethical enquiry, with all its talk of moral facts and properties, has little to do with their lives and the moral choices they will make.

We are often attached to our moral views and hold them in high esteem. Moral decisions are important to us as social beings and as individuals. We are, of course, concerned with what to do. But we do much more than simply feel attached to our moral judgements; we also insist on them, issue commands, claim we have moral authority, and try to persuade others to adopt our views. And in so doing, we may sometimes wonder what our moral judgements mean, we may wonder what it is exactly which explains a predicate like “is morally wrong”.

You may wonder, if you are having a moral argument with a friend, whether your friend means the same thing as you when you claim something is morally wrong. *This* thought – that we might be talking past one another during a moral debate - is not tied up in what we *should* do, but in *what we mean* when we say we should do something, whatever that something may be. This thought is, then, is the start of metaethical enquiry. And it is metaethics, and in particular the quasi-realist’s metaethical account of ethical discourse, which I will be concerned with in this thesis.

## Metaethics: A Brief History

The different engines driving both Blackburn and Gibbard's quasi-realist programmes have features which are unique to them, but the main thrust of their expressivism remains the same. For both Gibbard and Blackburn, moral discourse is an expressive enterprise intertwined with our emotions.

It is our emotions, desires, sentiments, and sensibilities which fuel our motivation to moral action. The view of morality that the quasi-realist endorses - that it is something inextricably linked to non-cognitive attitudes - is no surprise given the metaethical family tree Blackburn and Gibbard are part of. What started with Hume (1983; 1985) - with an argument which placed the passions and not reason as paramount for moral motivation and understanding the structure of ethics - developed into A. J. Ayre's Emotivism (Ayer, 1970) where expression of a moral judgement about *x* is an expression of approval or disapproval about *x*.

Ayre's emotivism has been challenged both for its inability to accommodate moral disagreement (James Rachels, 2012), and for its relativist consequences. On the first objection, it looks difficult to see how we can have disagreement at all. If Jones approves of *x*, and Smith disapproves, there is not much else to say. If, for example, Jones and Smith were discussing the merits of carrot cake and Jones expressed approval of it, but Smith expressed disapproval. There would not be a disagreement because there would be no sense of either Smith or Jones being wrong, but rather, they simply prefer or do not prefer carrot cake.

The assumption behind this objection is that the only adequate sense of moral disagreement is borne out of the acceptance of truth conditions for our moral judgements. Smith and Jones

invoking such conditions and claiming that each of their moral judgements about x is true, is, our interlocuter proposes, the only real sense we have of Smith and Jones disagreeing. It is the only real sense of disagreement because both Smith and Jones cannot be right. It cannot be the case that it's true that x is morally wrong, and true that it isn't.

Smith and Jones' disagreement lays bare a clash between their moral judgements, and their clash about what is true or not engenders their disagreement. Our interlocuter suggests that the emotivist, because she eschews the notion that moral judgement has truth conditions, has no such tools to explain a moral disagreement. She is unable, if she denies that moral judgements can be true or false, to accommodate disagreement because she has removed the very tool which allows her to explain why she thinks Smith and Jones are in disagreement.

A relativism charge comes swiftly behind the disagreement objection. If, when engaged in moral discourse, we only express approval and approval. And, if we can't appeal to truth conditions, then we end up with Smith and Jones both unable to agree or disagree, and they become their own moral islands. They cannot disagree, because there is no truth for them to disagree about. Nor can they agree about x, because there is nothing to share between them. What is right about x for Smith, is right for Smith. What is right for Jones about x, is right for Jones.

What is an emotivist to say in response? We can turn to C. L. Stevenson for guidance (Stevenson, 1972). On his view the expressivist can accommodate our notion of disagreement without accepting truth conditions for our moral judgements. Disagreement, he claims, is a clash in attitudes. When Smith disapproves of x, and Jones approves of not x; their disagreement is one of attitude. Smith cannot be coherent and claim that he both disapproves and approves of x. If he can't comfortably have both attitudes at once due to incoherence, then when we consider Smith's approval and Jones' disapproval there is also an incoherence about x. Having both

approval and disapproval towards  $x$ , like we saw on the disagreement case, is to be incoherent. If  $x$  is the same object for both Smith and Jones, then one of them must be wrong. In other words, we get our notion of disagreement from the fact that Smith and Jones have a clash in attitudes over  $x$ , and we get a non-relativistic notion of moral judgement from that clash of attitudes if it is a case of real disagreement. If it is a case of disagreement, then either Jones or Smith should adopt the other's attitude. Now, of course, this argument hangs on there being genuine disagreement between Smith and Jones, but I will not discuss this here. I will assume, for the sake of argument that this carries through, and discuss disagreement for the expressivist in the Fundamental Error chapter.

Next we will travel further up the metaethical timeline as we move from Stevenson to Mackie (1977). Quasi-realism is a response to Mackie's error theory and so it will serve us well to discuss it. Mackie argues that we assume that moral discourse has certain features. In particular, moral discourse is understood to be both objective and authoritative. The quasi-realist intends to reject the verdict of error theory; that our moral discourse is erroneous because it assumes our moral judgements are imbued with realist features (Olson, 2014).

The notion that realist features are part of our moral discourse, Mackie claims, runs into both epistemological and metaphysical difficulties. Briefly, on the first, epistemological, problem, we would need to have a special sense to detect and know of the moral facts and properties which realists accept.

Of course, Mackie is arguing against the robust realist, someone who gives a strong interpretation to moral facts and properties. A robust realist typically claims that moral facts and properties are non-naturalist, that is, moral fact ( $m$ ) does not reduce to some natural property ( $f$ ).

The worry is, that if moral facts are non-natural it is no longer clear how we can know about such facts.

The second, metaphysical, challenge focuses on what type of thing a robustly real moral fact would be. Once more, Mackie claims that it would be a very queer thing indeed. He concludes that a discourse which assumes the presence of such robust facts and properties must be erroneous. It must be erroneous because it cannot be made sense of; it cannot be explained in the way we would usually explain coming to know something, or how we would explain what an object is.

Quasi-realism responds to Mackie's claim that moral discourse is erroneous. It challenges the verdict that we must understand a robust sort of realism to ground our notion of moral facts and properties. Instead, the quasi-realist claims, we can understand and explain these notions via expressivism. This is, then, the main task of the quasi-realist. If she succeeds, then she can reject the error theory and vindicate our ordinary realist sounding moral discourse.

We will now look at Blackburn's quasi-realism in more depth. I will explore the main features of his theory, then turn to my own theory, ideal quasi-realism. This in-depth look at Blackburn's theory should set the foundations for the rest of the thesis.

## What is Quasi-Realism? Blackburn's Expressivism

Quasi-realism has two essential features; its engine and its rudder. The engine, the component which powers the quasi-realist programme, is expressivism. On this anti-realist view, ethical discourse expresses a non-cognitive attitude, but the way we should understand the attitude expressed differs between different expressivist theories.

For Simon Blackburn when we utter a moral judgement we express approval or disapproval (Blackburn, 1998, 1993, 1984). Allan Gibbard – another notable quasi-realist – argues instead that moral judgements expresses norms (1990). (In his later work, Gibbard develops his view and argues that moral discourse amounts to an expression of our plans (2003)). Recently, hybrid-expressivists (Ridge, 2014) have argued that we express a combination of conative and non-conative attitudes when we engage in moral discourse.

The balance between the cognitive and the non-cognitive on these views differs according to *why* a cognitive element is being employed. Mark Schroeder characterises the difference between hybrid-expressivism and non-hybrid-expressivism by labelling the first “adulterated expressivism” and the latter “pure expressivism” (Schroeder, 2015, p. 32).

Pure expressivism, the kind Blackburn and Gibbard endorse, is the view that “Both kinds of expressivists claim that it is part of the meaning of normative sentences to be used to express non-cognitive attitudes. But while pure expressivists hold that this exhausts their meaning, adulterated expressivists hold that normative sentences also have ordinary propositional

contents” (Schroeder, 2015, p. 32). Adulterated expressivism, to a certain extent, is a reply to pure expressivism. For example, Ridge (Ridge, 2014) argues that his ecumenical expressivism is better placed to solve the Frege-Geach problem. In particular, he argues that on pure expressivist accounts what looks like a perfectly fine epistemological inference is in fact more like wishful thinking. He claims that his view avoids this problem because the ecumenical expressivist infers from beliefs, whereas the pure expressivist infers from her attitudes (Ridge, 2014, p. 166) Inference from attitudes, Ridge claims, are “paradigm cases of wishful thinking” (Ridge, 2014, p. 167).

Arguing against Ridge’s claim will take us beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the objection nicely sets up the motivation for adulterated expressivism: it is intended to be a view which solves problems which the non-cognitivist-only accounts cannot in virtue of it including cognitivist features. My own version of quasi-realism is an attempt at solving the problems expressivists face as a pure expressivist. It is, then, an indirect answer to the question of whether we need adulterated expressivism to solve the problems which quasi-realism faces. My thesis shows the way for quasi-realists who do not wish to include a major cognitive element in their expressivism.

In particular, my theory will both solve important challenges for the quasi-realist, and show why we need to develop Blackburn’s quasi-realism at all. I don’t, however, attempt to solve all of the objections which are directed at the quasi-realist. First, because this would result in a bloated thesis which may transgress the upper word limit. Second, because I prefer, instead, to select a few related problems which draw their inspiration from two broad types of challenge for the quasi-realist: that claim quasi-realism either isn’t realist enough, or the claim that it isn’t anti-realist enough.

I have picked objections from both camps and I have selected them because they are crucial to the success of the quasi-realist programme, but not given as much attention as, for example, the Frege-Geach problem. I wanted my thesis to make room for and explore the literature about problems which are far less explored but no less deserving of exploration. Out of all the chapters, the problem of fundamental error has received the most attention in the literature. Whereas the relativism problem has received the least.

The other challenges that I deal with; the moral attitude problem, Street's evolutionary debunking argument, and the moral neutrality of quasi-realism are all related in a few key ways. First, as I have said, the problems stem from challenges to whether quasi-realism has a right to logical space in the metaethical landscape; quasi-realism is read as either not doing enough to echo realist sounding moral discourse, or as doing far too much and so collapses into a form of realism<sup>1</sup>. The objections from both camps focus on how much or how little the projectivist can buy for the quasi-realist. Each chapter, then, deals with a problem which targets a particular component of projectivism and aims to show why the quasi-realist does not have to reject her projectivism to overcome the problems raised against it (Blackburn, 1998).<sup>2</sup>

We will now turn to the a second feature of Blackburn's programme: the rudder, quasi-realism itself. Quasi-realism has a directive role. Its purpose is to explain and justify moral discourse (1984, p. 180), but any conception of moral discourse won't suffice. The quasi-realist wants to vindicate a specific understanding of moral discourse; realist sounding moral discourse. On this view of moral discourse utterances of truth, moral facts, and mind-independence are all part of our ethical utterances. On this view we understand our moral claims and judgements to have authority and thus, normative force.

<sup>1</sup> What kind of realism is important. I will discuss this in the final chapter.

<sup>2</sup> I use the terms "Projectivism" and "Expressivism" interchangeably unless otherwise stated. I do this because, for Blackburn, they mean the same thing. See Blackburn, 1998, p. 77.



The notion of moral authority is crucial to our view of moral discourse. Moral arguments and disagreements are built on the assumption that our moral judgements have moral authority. We would find it unusual if, during a disagreement, one speaker immediately agreed with his interlocuter's opposing conclusion despite her giving no argument to support it. When we engage with moral discourse we engage with it to persuade, to demand, to admonish, or support. We do not enter a moral argument simply to concede, or to merely utter our opinion and be done with it. We hold, with high probability, that we are right about our moral outlook.

The realist has some things in common with the quasi-realist, her aims are similar to those of the quasi-realist but with one crucial difference; the realist accepts a metaphysics that the quasi-realist rejects. The aim of quasi-realism is to accommodate the features of realist sounding moral discourse by making use of expressivism, but the discourse they wish to vindicate is only "realist sounding", it is not straightforwardly realist.

There are judgements found in our moral discourse such as "it's true that x is morally wrong" that are understood to gesture at a sort of realism, without invoking a realist metaphysics and ontology to do so. Quasi-realism, then, sits in a unique logical space. Anti-realism sits on one side of it, bringing with it the wholesale rejection of robustly real mind-independent moral facts, and realism sits on the other side; with its notions of objective moral authority, and of moral truth. But the space she occupies might look suspect. How, one might ask, can the quasi-realist make sense of moral facts and moral truth, whilst avoiding error theory? To understand why the quasi-realist is not in tension with herself we must explore her theory in more depth.

When the quasi-realist claims that she wants to explain and justify our realist sounding moral discourse, we need to know which version of realism she is referring too. If we don't, then we

cannot be sure what she is trying to explain and justify. If quasi-realism is a response to error theory, then the realism she is trying to explain is a fairly strong non-naturalist realism. Now, quasi-realism is a naturalist theory, it doesn't posit anything over and above what is in the natural world. So, we should not understand the quasi-realist as trying to make sense of non-naturalist metaphysics. Their programme does not attempt to echo everything the realist does, if it did, it would run into the same problems it was meant to solve.

Quasi-realism is not an attempt to simply do everything the realist does in the same way the realist achieves, or fails to achieve it. As Gibbard claims, the quasi-realist doesn't have to echo everything the realist does to succeed in her programme (Shafer-Landau, 2011). Instead, the quasi-realist echoes a tempered realism; "a tempered version of realism that denies that normative judgments must meet all the epistemological requirements that pertain to paradigm facts" (Shafer 2011, p. 33).

Blackburn's quasi-realism also points towards echoing a tempered realism, rather than robust realism. The importance of this claim will be explored in the last chapter: Evolution, Mind-Independence, and Quasi-Realism. For now, however, the claim gives us some insight into what the quasi-realist wants to echo from the realist and what she does not.

One might be puzzled at this point; we've just talked about quasi-realism as a response to error theory, and we know that Mackie applies his theory to robust realism. But both Gibbard and Blackburn seem to deny that the realist features they are explaining and justifying are robustly real. They only want to explain and justify a tempered version. But, as we've learned, it is not a tempered version which Mackie targets. He is concerned with metaphysical queerness, and tempered realism could explain the accretions of realism; properties, facts, and so forth, on a naturalist metaphysical foundation. But if the tempered realist can do all this - and let us assume

for the moment that he can - then Mackie's arguments don't apply, and there is no subsequent need for a response.

So, we need to dig a little deeper. We first need to understand what, exactly, the quasi-realist is echoing if she is attempting to echo only tempered realism. The answer lies in what the quasi-realist means by "echo". Gibbard denies that moral facts are like paradigmatic scientific facts. We don't expect the same things from moral facts as we do from scientific facts; first, we don't have the same tests for accuracy. Second, we don't expect to discover moral facts in the same way we discover scientific facts. This amounts to evidence that moral facts and scientific facts are not on a par. For Gibbard, it's incoherent to claim that "normative facts are facts like any other" (Gibbard, 2011, p. 33).

As I have said, we will discuss Gibbard's explanation of tempered realism in the last chapter. For now, we will assume that this is a legitimate claim the quasi-realist can make. If this is so, and the quasi-realist isn't trying to echo robust moral realism, but only certain parts of tempered realism, then one may wonder where this leaves quasi-realism as a response to Mackie.

Perhaps it is enough to motivate quasi-realism if we can apply a queerness argument to tempered realism. Gibbard writes that tempered realism only differs from quasi-realism in one important aspect: "The tempered realist is asking about something he starts out thinking to be a fact, that pain in animals matters in itself. Its being a candidate fact is supposed to figure centrally in explaining how to judge it" (Gibbard, 2011, p. 45). The quasi-realist, on the other hand, does not assume that facts are central to their explanation of the normative.

This is a revealing distinction; it tells us why a quasi-realist is not a tempered realist. And Gibbard makes it clear that we should not echo everything the tempered realist accepts because

holding facts to be central to moral discourse generates problems the expressivist can easily avoid. Gibbard writes “We can't, though, mimic the claim that understanding normative properties and relations as objective matters of fact is basic to explaining how judgments of wrongness work. That, as I have said, isn't a credible part of the tempered normative realist's package” (2011, p. 46). Does Blackburn and Gibbard's echoing tempered rather than robust realism diminish the motivation for quasi-realism? It does not.

The quasi-realist is interested in echoing what Blackburn calls the “surface grammar” of our moral discourse. That is, the realistic *appearance* of our moral discourse. Echoing this surface does not thereby mean that he must echo all of the realist mechanics that lie under the surface of our moral discourse. But there is something which remains unclear about this answer. Of course the quasi-realist doesn't want to adopt the mechanics of a realist account. If she did, then she would simply be a realist. And of course the difference between tempered and robust realism is in terms of their respective mechanics and associated epistemological and metaphysics consequences. The difference is there, if only slight: tempered and robust realism have different epistemological implications. But the question still remains: whence the motivation for quasi-realism given the target of error theory?

To answer this question we must look, once more, at tempered realism and what the quasi-realist intends to echo from tempered realism. Although the quasi-realist does not echo the robust realist's epistemology or her metaphysics wholesale, she does wish to echo the normative force which, supposedly, comes along with the view that moral judgements express robust moral facts. She does not think that a rejection of robust moral realism must include a rejection of the realistic features of our discourse like moral authority, objectivity, and truth. In this sense, then, quasi-realism remains a response to error theory even though it claims to echo tempered realism. The response consists in a vindication, explanation, and accommodation of surface features of

moral discourse which we normally associate with moral realism. The quasi-realist claims that we can make sense of these features but only via her projectivist-expressivism. We need not, she claims, turn to the realist's epistemology, nor his metaphysics, to make sense of such features.

## **Projectivism**

When, on the expressivist view, you voice a moral judgement, you express a conative attitude. That is, you express a non-cognitive attitude. For the realist, you express a belief; a cognitive attitude with truth conditions. Your belief can be true or false, your conative attitude cannot. The expressivist does not hold that we describe a moral reality when we engage in moral discourse. We do not describe something true about the world, nor do we refer to a robust moral fact; something mind-independent and exacting<sup>3</sup>. Instead, on Blackburn's particular view, when you express an attitude it is projected onto the world. Moral right and wrong do not, to echo Hume, exist in the moral situation themselves (Hume and Mossner p. 520 – 521). Rather, right and wrong are tied up in our own attitudes. Blackburn gives three arguments to motivate his use of projectivism. On his first argument he claims that projectivism fits well with a broadly naturalist understanding of the world (Timmons, 1999).

Projectivism, Blackburn claims, is economical compared to theories which include notions such as moral perception. He writes "it asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it. By contrast a theory assimilating moral understanding to perception demands

<sup>3</sup> I will discuss mind-independence in the Evolution, Mind-Independence, and Quasi-Realism. For now, I will take it that a broad brush understanding of mind-independent moral facts is to view moral facts as separate to one's desires or wishes, where they have normative force on your behaviour. The most extreme version of this view would be a non-natural robust moral fact which does not reduce to any natural properties, and has normative force. There are conceptions, of course, of mind independent facts which are natural, but I will turn to discussion of such distinctions in the Mind-Independence chapter.

more of the world” (Blackburn, 1984, p. 182). A theory which includes causal perception demands more of the world because it must not only explain how we value and evaluate things in the world, but it must also tell us how we perceive the value of things. Projectivism, in contrast, explains how we value things, but it does not need to posit a perceptual model of value, because the main thrust of the theory is that we impinge our attitudes on the world, rather than perceiving value already out there. Anscombe’s (Anscombe, 1957) world-mind distinction can help us understand the projectivist a little better. She introduces the distinction with an example.

We must imagine two people: the first is a man armed with a shopping list walking around the supermarket. The second is a detective noting down whatever the first man purchases. Suppose at the end of shopping both men have exactly the same items on their respective lists. For the first man, if his list and what he has purchased do not match, then the man has made the error: he needed to get bread, but instead he got milk. For the first man, his list has a “world to word” direction of fit because the list is the guide for the items selection; the items put in the trolley need to match the list. In contrast, if the detective writes down “jam” when the man shopping picked up “peanut butter”, then the mistake is on the detective’s list.

For the second man, his list has a “word to world” direction of fit because the detective’s list should match the items the first man put in his trolley. The world is the guide, rather than the list, for the detective. (Anscombe, 1957, p. 56). These distinctions roughly translate to the difference between speech acts which have a world to word fit (desires) and speech acts which have a word to world fit (beliefs). The former has no truth conditions, latter does. In other words, a desire shapes the world; it moulds it in your own vision. Whereas a belief conforms to the world, it’s truth lies in what the world is like.

If a metaethical theory claims that moral judgements are beliefs, then it has a word to world direction of fit, but if this is the case, then it looks like morality resides in the objects those beliefs are about. A metaethical theory like projectivism, however, claims that we project our attitudes onto the world. According to the projectivist we have a world to word direction of fit. We don't perceive morality, rather, we project our attitudes onto the world.

The projectivist's view of the world is broadly naturalist. She aims to have her theory fit with our best scientific theories. Railton (Haldane and Wright, 1993) gives a distinction between different types of naturalism which will help us to understand exactly what the quasi-realist is committed to when she claims she is a naturalist. Railton distinguishes between two types of naturalist; the methodological naturalist, and the substantive naturalist. According to his view, Blackburn's theory is methodologically natural. It aims to fit with our best scientific understanding of the world.

On this view the philosophical approach to explanation is an a posteriori one (Haldane and Wright, 1993, p. 315). The methodological naturalist is only concerned with the empirical world. In contrast, the substantive naturalist "is someone who proposes a semantic interpretation of the concepts in some area of practice or discourse in terms of properties or relations that would 'pull their weight' within empirical science" (Haldane and Wright, 1993, p. 315). The essential difference between methodological and substantive naturalism is that the latter allows for a priori analysis to inform how we should understand our concepts (Miller, 2003, p.179). She doesn't, however, think moral properties are reducible to natural properties. She rejects, for example, the claim that moral goodness just reduces to a natural property like pleasure. Instead, evaluative properties are projections of our own sentiments. They supervene on natural properties, but they are not reducible to them.

The second motivation for projectivism is how it handles supervenience. Blackburn claims (1984) that the projectivist, unlike the realist, offers an explanation for supervenience and the ban on mixed worlds. Supervenience is conceptual necessity, if we imagine two events with the same natural description, they should also have the same moral evaluation (2003, p. 54).

Conceptual necessity is a weaker claim than necessitation. When we claim that the moral supervenes on the natural, we understand this claim to mean that if both A and B share the same natural description, then they will share the same moral evaluation (Miller, 2003, p. 54). In contrast, necessitation can be understood as the claim that in any possible world the same naturalistic description determines the moral evaluation (Miller, 2003, p. 54). Miller writes “to say that natural properties necessitate moral properties is to say that, in any possible world, all of the moral properties of an act or event are determined by its complete naturalistic description N” (Miller, 2003, p. 54).

The difference between the two lies in whether moral evaluation is the upshot of a natural description. Blackburn writes “it does not seem a matter of conceptual or logical necessity that any given total natural state of a thing gives it some particular moral property. For to tell which moral quality results from a given natural state means using standards whose correctness cannot be shown by conceptual means alone. It means moralizing, and bad people moralize badly, but need not be confused” (1984, p. 184). In other words, one can understand the natural concepts of a situation but still come to the wrong moral judgement about it. Of course, as Miller comments, Blackburn’s claim about confusion begs the question again conceptual necessitation, since he assumes that there is no confusion on the level of the natural description (2003, p. 291).

The third motive Blackburn gives for adopting projectivism is moral motivation. The projectivist accepts a Humean moral psychology whereby moral motivation requires both belief and some



sort of conative attitude. Michael Smith (Smith, 1995, p. 92) sums up the strong version of Humean moral motivation well, he writes “motivation has its source in the presence of a relevant desire and means-end belief [...] in order for a desire and belief to constitute a motivating reason the agent must, as it were, put the relevant desire and belief together” (Smith, 1995, 92; Smith, 1988). For the projectivist, a belief represents something about the world. For example, let us take a rather disturbing example from Harman (1977) to illustrate this. Suppose you see a group of people pouring gasoline on a cat. You believe the people are in front of you, and you believe you see them pouring gasoline on a cat. Your beliefs, as far as you know, are a true representation of the world. And so you believe it is true that a group of people are pouring gasoline on a cat. But this is all there is, according to the projectivist, to a belief’s role in our moral evaluations. It is our attitudes, and our projection of them onto the world, which have the largest part to play in the quasi-realist’s explanation of moral judgement.

### **The Staircase of Emotional and Practical Ascent**

In *Ruling Passions* (Blackburn, 1998) Blackburn writes that we can think of conative attitudes in terms of a staircase of emotional and practical ascent. At the bottom are preferences, for example, my like of chocolate ice cream. If we hold an attitude at the top of the staircase and encounter someone with a contrary view we may be hostile in response. We may also, in addition to having very strong emotions at the top of the staircase, issue practical and physical pressure for those with the contrary attitude to adopt a different attitude (1998, p. 8). Something which we would not do (and indeed, would not feel a need to do) for preferences. The higher up the staircase we go, the more likely we are to encourage others to accept our view. Blackburn writes “Suppose [...] I share your anger or feel ‘at one’ with you for so reacting. It may stop there, but I may also feel strongly disposed to encourage others to share the same anger. By then I am clearly

treating the matter as one of public concern, something like a moral issue” (Blackburn, 1998, p. 9).

Blackburn claims that a moral sensibility is a combination of an input of information about the world and an output of conative reactions. The staircase<sup>4</sup>, Blackburn claims, is a way to think about the reactive conative attitudes which make up the output.

The staircase is not intended to be a definition of where preferences and moral attitudes meet, but a rough guide of where types of attitude should be placed on a scale of emotional and practical responses. Blackburn refers to the top of the scale, where you have strong emotional, and/or practical inclinations in regard to your attitude and others adopting it that you have “attitudes with all the flavour of ethical commitment” (1998, p 9.) He makes it clear, however, that this is not a strict definition. Indeed, he does not think a definition of what “the” moral attitude should be forthcoming. Ethics, Blackburn claims, is too diverse for that.

As we’ll see in the next chapter, The Moral Attitude Problem, this response has been challenged by both Alexander Miller (Miller, 2003) and David Merli (Merli, 2007a). I will explore what a moral attitude is, and whether the quasi-realist can say what it is. I resist the move for a definition, and instead take the typical expressivist route of explaining what we do when we express a moral attitude rather than a non-moral attitude. Given the length of the discussion in the next chapter there is no need to pre-empt it in the introduction. As such I will swiftly move on to another aspect of Blackburn’s account: stable attitudes.

<sup>4</sup> I shall use “staircase” to refer to the full name the staircase of emotional and practical ascent for brevity.

## **Stable Attitudes**

On Blackburn's account a stable attitude is one we will resist revising. We will not, by our own lights, see our stable attitudes as requiring further improvement. Blackburn writes "so, if we imagine the general field of an agent's concerns, his or her values might be regarded as those concerns that he is also concerned to preserve: the ones by which he stands" (Blackburn, 1998, p. 67). In contrast, Blackburn suggests that where we to think about a preference for, say, ice-cream, we can "be quite clam contemplating a future state I which I would not desire it" (1998, p. 67). The contrast between stable attitudes and preferences is quite clear; for preferences we would be unlikely to resist our preference changing, for our stable attitudes, we would.

What we must now determine is whether stable attitudes are the likely candidates for the attitudes at the top of the staircase. If you hold attitudes at the top of the staircase, you would encourage others to adopt the same attitude and sometimes, express hostility – or some other strong negative emotion - towards those with a contrary attitude.

Attitudes which do not come with strong emotions can still be placed at the top of the staircase if they issue strong practical pressures against the person with a contrary attitude (1998, p 9 – 10). Stable attitudes are attitudes which you do not imagine you will need to revise in the future, nor will you want it to be revised in the future. Blackburn claims that our values are stable dispositions to "conduct practical life and practical discussion in a particular way: it is to be disposed or set in that way, and notably to set against change in this respect" (1998, p. 67). On the above we should read a "stable disposition" as a stable attitude. One may wonder if this is

the case. Perhaps, one might claim, two senses of stability are being employed where the stable attitude issues in the stable disposition. But this is not so. Blackburn writes “to hold a value is to have a relatively fixed attitude to some aspect of things, an attitude which one identifies in the sense of being set to resist change” (1998, p. 68). For Blackburn, our values are our stable attitudes. Attitudes at the top of the staircase are ones in which we can have strong emotional and practical connection to. Moreover, attitudes at the top of the staircase are ones which we try to persuade others to adopt. Further, Blackburn makes it clear that considering your preference for ice-cream changing in the future would not cause upset, unlike considering a change in a value.

From the above it is clear that stable attitudes are not preferences; we are not attached to preferences, nor we do not become upset at the prospect of their being revised. If values are not preferences, then we must place them somewhere else on the staircase. The only remaining place for them is the upper echelons of the staircase, but we still must assess whether they belong there.

We can do this by looking closer at link between the staircase metaphor and stable attitudes. Blackburn claims that stable attitudes “issues in many dispositions , at various places on the staircase of emotional ascent” (1998, p. 68). As we’ve seen above, however, it seems unlikely that stable attitudes can be found in the preferences section of the staircase. As we’ve seen, stable attitudes are resistant to revision, whereas preferences do not seem to be. Indeed, the notion of revising a preference does not seem quite right: how would one, after all, revise a preference for chocolate ice-cream? And even if one simply imagined a sudden new preference for vanilla ice-cream instead, as Blackburn claims, this does not seem to be a possible revision that would upset anyone.

Blackburn, then, can't claim stable attitudes issue in *any* place in the staircase, but only in the sections above preferences. The claim that stable attitudes are not preferences is an important one for the quasi-realist who intends to explain ordinary moral discourse which includes features like moral authority and objectivity. This particular claim will be particularly important in the Metaethical Neutrality Chapter where Enoch claims that the quasi-realist equates attitudes to preferences. Further, this claim will also be important for the next chapter The Moral Attitude Problem.

Blackburn denies there is one place on the staircase where we can point to the moral attitude. This is roughly because if stable attitudes are our values, and if our values can be placed anywhere on the staircase then we cannot point to one section of the staircase and declare those attitudes distinctly moral. As we've seen above, however, this is not the case. If, as we've observed, stable attitudes simply cannot be preferences, then there is a distinctive line drawn through the staircase. If this is so, then Blackburn needs to say more about what the moral attitude is and we will investigate his account further in the next chapter. For now, let us move on to a sketch of mind-independence, a notion which depends, somewhat, on our understanding of our stable attitudes and the moral sensibilities they are a part of.

## **Mind-Independence**

Although I do not explore the problem of Frege-Geach in my thesis, there are occasions when a tangent discussion of it is necessary. Blackburn uses his solutions to the Frege-Geach problem in *Spreading The Word* (1984) to explain what mind-independence is for the quasi-realist. Briefly, his proposal is to claim that when we express moral judgements in embedded contexts we are

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the problems with Blackburn's proposed solution see section 16 of *Reality, Representation, and Projection* (Haldane and Wright, 1993).

expressing approval or disapproval of different sensibilities (1984, p. 192). Blackburn's tactic is to use the expressivist manoeuvre: we need to ascertain how commitments can be put into conditionals (1984, p. 192). Let us take the classic example below and see how Blackburn responds to it:

"It is wrong to tell lies.

If it is wrong to tell lies, it is wrong to get your little brother to tell lies" (Blackburn, 1984, p. 190).

The first sentence is easy enough, the expressivist can say she is expressing an attitude of disapproval towards lying. But on the second, no such explanation is forthcoming. It looks like she can't offer any attitude up as being expressed. Blackburn's solution is to propose the expressivist does not express simple approval, instead she expresses approval towards moral sensibilities. Blackburn writes "[...] a sensibility which pairs an attitude of disapproval towards getting your little brother to tell lies, and an attitude of calm or approval towards getting your little brother to tell lies would not meet my endorsement" (1984, p. 192). It is the notion of approving or disapproving of different sensibilities which Blackburn uses in his explanation of mind-independence. Let us return to why the quasi-realist needs to explain mind-independence and how she does so.

The quasi-realist claims that our moral judgements are mind-independent. As a crucial feature of realist sounding moral discourse it is important for the quasi-realist to accommodate the notion that our moral judgements are mind-independent. Blackburn writes "It is not because of the way we form sentiments that kicking dogs is wrong. It would be wrong whatever we thought about it. [...] The 'mind-independence' of such facts is part of our ordinary way of looking at things" (1984, p. 217). Blackburn asks us to imagine someone who thinks that "if we had different

sentiments it would be right to kick dogs', what could he be up to?" (1984, p. 218). Blackburn claims that this person endorses a moral sensibility in which the attitudes we have determine what is right and wrong. That is "he endorses a certain sensibility: one which lets information about how other people feel dictate its attitude to kicking dogs" (1984, p. 219). For Blackburn, our moral propositions do not reduce to what we think. He writes "when I say that Hitler was evil or that trees cause shade I am not talking about myself" (1984, p 218). What makes kicking dogs wrong, Blackburn claims, is the suffering the dogs experience. Kicking dogs is not wrong because of your attitude of approval or disapproval about kicking dogs.

I will discuss mind-independence and how accommodating the notion of mind-independence causes, according to Street, trouble for the quasi-realist in the last chapter. For now, however, let us continue with our overview of quasi-realism by moving on to some of the other important features of Blackburn's view, before moving onto a sketch of ideal quasi-realism.

### **Moral Truth: a best set of attitudes or deflationary?**

In his earlier work (Blackburn, 1984) Blackburn explained moral truth in terms of a best possible set of attitudes. In his later work, he adopts a deflationary truth account. I'll sketch both accounts here, but my main interest will be in the former account because, although I'm not using it as an account of moral truth, I draw on it and develop the notion of a best set of attitudes for ideal quasi-realism. Let us begin with the first account. I'm taking my cues for this account from Blackburn's *Spreading The Word* where Blackburn notes that the account he gives is by no means the best, he writes that it is "only a first approximation" (Blackburn, 1984, p. 198).

On the first view we would have a "best possible set of attitudes". This set of attitudes will have gone through all possible improvements; our attitudes have been revised to be the best set of

attitudes. Truth, on this account would be to say “that it is a member of such a set” (1984, p. 198). If we label the best set of attitudes  $M^*$  “then if  $m$  is a particular commitment, expressing an attitude  $U$ ;  $m$  is true =  $U$  is a member of  $M^*$ ” (1984, p. 198).

Blackburn’s first task is to explain what a best possible moral sensibility is. He mentions that the notions of improvement and deterioration are available to us<sup>6</sup>, but that this doesn’t help us yet. We can conceive of various sensibilities which may slowly become better until we have two separate sets of attitudes:  $M^*$  and  $M^*_t$  (1984, p. 200). Blackburn draws on Hume’s *Of the Standard of Taste* (Hume, 2013) to show how we can avoid relativism on this account of truth.

Blackburn writes “The point of this emerges if we ask the question: who is to adopt the following three views:

- (1)  $M^*_o \rightarrow$  it is true that Ovid is better than Tacitus
- (2)  $M^*_t \rightarrow$  it is true that Tacitus is better than Ovid
- (3) There is no possible improvement on either  $M^*_o$  or  $M^*_t$

(where ‘ $M^* \rightarrow$  it is true that  $m$ ’ means that  $M^*$  contains an attitude which is expressed by the sentence  $m$ ”) (1984, p. 200).

The solution to the problem above is to not see it as a problem at all, but an indication that both must be wrong. Blackburn asks that we “transcend the tree structure” where  $M^*_o$   $M^*_t$  are both

<sup>6</sup> One might object that these notions are not available to the quasi-realist at all. Indeed, one might push the point by suggesting that only a theory which includes moral facts can make a claim to improvement. This is an important point, but not one I will deal with in this chapter. I’m going to assume this claim is true in this chapter, simply because this is an introductory chapter intended to explain the main features of quasi-realism. Throughout the thesis I discuss improvement for the quasi-realist, and this should hopefully suffice to show how improvement works on the quasi-realist account.



two branches of truth. We must take the claims that both 1 and 2 are attitudes which are part of the best possible set of attitudes as a sign that this cannot be true, because if this were the case, then there would be only one. One cannot allow for two best set of possible attitudes. Blackburn suggests that in light of this we understand the problem as a “signal that the truth is not yet fully argued, and it goes into discussions as part of the evidence” (1984, p. 201).

On this account of truth we start to see Blackburn’s explanation of improvement emerge. He writes:

“It is as though the trunk – the core of opinion to which there is no admirable alternative – contains the power to grow through any of the choices of opinion which lead to branching: the choices become themselves part of the knowledge which the progress of attitude must use to form its course. In so far as acquaintance with another value-system makes me respect it, then it properly makes me rethink both systems, transcending the tree structure” (1984, p. 201)

We find, in the quotation above, Blackburn discussing the idea of another view being admirable or worthy of respect. The former idea – that another view can be admirable – is important for his later work about how one can improve on, rather than simply change, their moral sensibility. I explore this idea, and just how crucial it is, in the Fundamental Error Problem.

In Blackburn’s later work he adopts a deflationary theory of truth, and although he no longer claims to construct truth from the best possible set of attitudes, he does still make use of some of the resources – like admirability – from his earlier work. In his later work he explicitly drops the notion of a best set of possible attitudes. Indeed, we can see this development in *Ruling Passions* where he writes “I am a little careful about saying that there is a ‘best set of possible

attitudes'. I think rather that improvement is a practical, real, goal, and thinking of improvement in terms of aiming at the best is natural enough. The 'best set of attitudes' becomes a focus imaginarius on which our efforts are targeted [...] What matters is the process, not the reality of its end-point"(1998, p. 313). The notion of admiration and subsequent improvement has remained, and the 'best set' of attitudes has been changed into an aim, rather than an actuality.

Given that Blackburn expresses his reservations about constructing truth via sets of attitudes it is no surprise that he turns to another account of truth in his later work. His adoption of deflationary truth, is intended to allow for him to claim "x is true" without any added metaphysical or ontological baggage. If the theory works, then Blackburn gets his cake and eat it too.

My concern in this thesis is to defend projectivist-expressivism from some of the major problems it faces. With this in mind, I do not delve into the problems that deflationary truth encounters<sup>7</sup>. One may suggest that deflationary truth is integral to the expressivist theory and thus something I should contend with. I do not think this is the case for this thesis. Bar the notion that a discussion of deflationary truth and its defence would be a thesis unto itself there are other reasons for not discussing at length here. Supposing the deflationary truth account is unsuccessful, the quasi-realist may turn to another theory of truth (a coherence account, or a reliability account – indeed, to some extent Blackburn already draws on both accounts).

<sup>7</sup> I use deflationary truth and minimalist truth interchangeably. One of the recent problems associated with deflationary truth is Creeping Minimalism. The worry that once the expressivist adopts minimalist truth, there won't be any difference between her view and a realist view. Why? Because as Jamie Dreier writes "Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts. If successful, it can help Expressivism recapture the ordinary realist language of ethics. But in so doing it also threatens to make irrealism indistinguishable from realism. That is the problem of Creeping Minimalism" (2004, p. 26)

Supposing, on the other hand, that the deflationary truth account is successful, one may still find problems with projectivism. Indeed, we know that quasi-realism does not require projectivist-expressivism to explain moral judgements, one may turn to Gibbard's norm-expressivism, or his later development of his view: plan-expressivism (Gibbard, 2002) (Gibbard, 2008). So, it is not clear-cut that if deflationary truth is successful, then there is nothing left to say. One must still fill in the gaps and explain what one is expressing when one voices a moral judgement. Indeed, this is especially important given that deflationary truth asks us to regard "it's true that p" and "p" as the same. With the above in mind I will return to my sketch of deflationary truth before moving onto the final key feature of Blackburn's account.

Blackburn, reflecting on Wittgenstein's dismissal of representationalism writes "The implication is that we can talk of metaphysical, mathematical, modal truth because that is just to repeat our commitments in these arenas" (Blackburn, 1998, p. 78). If all the quasi-realist has to do is echo the propositional surface of our moral discourse, then a minimalist truth should, if successful, allow him to do this. Or at least, it should allow him to do this in part.

Blackburn continues "Because of minimalism we can have for free what look like a ladder of philosophical ascent: 'p', 'it is true that p', 'it is really and truly a fact that p'..., none of these terms in Ramsey's view, marks an addition to the original judgement. You can easily make the last judgement the first-Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground horizontal" (1998, p. 78)<sup>8</sup>. If the above discussion does not satisfy the reader, then rest assured that I continue to discuss deflationary truth in more depth in the mind-independence chapter. For now, the above should suffice as a sketch of deflationary truth. As I said, however, my main concern is with projectivism itself. If the truth does deflate, and there is no difference between saying "it's true

<sup>8</sup> The paper Blackburn is referring to is Ramsey's "Facts and Propositions" (Ramsey and Moore, 1927)

that be” and “p”, then the onus is on the projectivist to do a good job of explaining what expressing “p” amounts to.

## **The Core Expressivist Manoeuvre**

Lastly, we need to discuss one of the key moves the quasi-realist makes. J. Adam Carter and Matthew Chrisman call this move “the core expressivist manoeuvre” (Carter and Chrisman, 2012). Gibbard calls it a change of question (2003, p. 6) and Blackburn explains the manoeuvre as a shift of focus so that what, at first, we thought was a metaethical question, is, in fact, an ethical one (1998, p. 311).

When the expressivist is asked what “good” is he changes the question to what it is to say x is good. The manoeuvre, then, is one which refocuses the philosophical challenge at the level of how that discourse is employed. ‘What’ questions, become ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. Blackburn writes that “the question appears to be asked at the meta-level, and perhaps is intended as a meta-level question. But there is no such meta-level question” (1998, p. 311). The core expressivist manoeuvre allows the expressivist to eschew giving definitions. Instead, she asks what we are doing when we utter moral judgements. When, for example, you utter “murder is morally wrong” the quasi-realist does not then investigate what a definition of “morally wrong” would be, but instead she is concerned with an investigation beyond conceptual analysis. She is concerned with a broader way of doing philosophy which asks more of the philosopher than definitions (Timmons, 1999, p. 24).

Let us now move on to ideal quasi-realism to look at some of the similarities and differences between Blackburn’s quasi-realism and my own. My hope is that this sketch should both highlight how I’ve developed Blackburn’s view, but also offer a roadmap for the reader to refer back to should any metaethical jargon get the best of them (as it can sometimes do).

## **Ideal Quasi-Realism**

Ideal Quasi-Realism employs projectivist-expressivism to achieve its aim of accommodating realist sounding moral discourse. On my view, moral judgements express approval of a match between your own attitude towards x and the attitude an ideal version of you would have. On my account normative force is derived from the agreement in attitude between yourself and ideal you.

The theory is non-cognitivist, that is, as we can see above the primary expression of moral judgements are understood to be in terms of pro and con attitudes and my view is non-ecumenical. That is, it strictly denies Michael Ridge's development of ecumenical expressivism (2014) where moral judgements express both beliefs and some sort of conative attitude. Instead, ideal quasi-realism is in line with Blackburn's Humean projectivism. It holds that we only, ultimately, express a conative attitude when we express a moral judgement. On my view when we approve or disapprove of x, we are not simply approving or disapproving as the emotivist would claim.

Instead, we are expressing a match between our set of attitudes and our ideal advisors. The ideal advisor is not an other-worldly advisor, impossible to imagine; the ideal version of you is not god-like. Instead, she is an ideal version of yourself. As ideal as you can imagine yourself to be in terms of eliminating bias, being coherent, and so forth. Crucially, the ideal advisor also benefits from a veil of ignorance a la Rawls (1971, p. 137), and she is equipped with a form of reflective equilibrium. Since this is starting to sound like a rather bloated theory, let me clarify what I mean by looking at it step by step.

When you express “x is morally right” on my view, you express both approval towards x, and approval towards a match between your own approval and your ideal advisors approval. You are not, then simply approving of whatever your ideal advisor claims is worthy of approval. You are, instead, considering whether Ideal You’s attitudes match with Regular You’s attitudes. It is the match between Ideal You and Regular You which brings with it normative force. In contrast, a preference for carrot cake over victoria sponge would generate a null result from Ideal You. This is where the veil of ignorance comes in.

Ideal You is ideal in so far as she is shut off from certain facts about your life. On Rawls’ theory (Rawls, 2005) anyone behind the veil of ignorance is unaware of what her position will be in society. Of course, we are not concerned with political society as Rawls was. Rather we are using features of his view to build up an expressivist friendly normative force. Ideal You, then, is behind a veil of ignorance. When she considers a moral problem – and in turn the moral discourse related to said problem - she is unaware of whether she is the perpetrator, or the victim.

In other words, she does not know if she is the one being murdered, or the murderer. Regular You, on the other hand, knows full well who she is in the moral scenario. Both Regular and Ideal you express judgements about a moral situation: “murder is morally wrong”. Regular You sees it from their individual perspective, Ideal You from behind the veil. These two verdicts either match or they do not match.

### **Ideal Quasi-Realism and Stability**

What does it mean to say that a judgement is stable for the ideal quasi-realist? On this view your judgement is stable within an equilibrium between Regular You and Ideal You. Regular You and Ideal You work together much like an equilibrium does. Typically an equilibrium of judgements

involves particular stages which serve to check the judgements and maintain an overall coherence between them. For example, Norman Daniels (1979) explains that a wide reflective equilibrium such as the one proposed by Rawls (1971) is composed of three parts.

Daniels' writes "an ordered triple of sets of beliefs held by a particular person, namely, (a) a set of considered moral judgments, (b) a set of moral principles, and (c) a set of relevant background theories" (1979, p. 258). On Daniels' view a considered judgement is one which has undergone some reflection, it is in contrast to a split second judgement. Moral principles are those principles we associate with different ethical theories, and a relevant background theory will be some type of empirical theory.

Now, Daniels' project is to put forward an account that will explain our moral reasoning in greater depth. He also wishes to show how some disagreements which may seem intractable on the surface are not so tough to solve once we view them in terms of his tripartite theory (Daniels, 1979, p. 257). Furthermore, Daniels' project is a development of Rawls own wide reflective equilibrium, although each author has different aims. Whereas Daniels' aim is to explore a more precise way to think about theory acceptance in ethics, Rawls is concerned with principles of justice. I will take a third approach with Rawls wide reflective equilibrium by establishing a tripartite model as part of metaethical explanation. My aim in doing this is to show how the interaction between Ideal You and Regular You works. After all, we may know on the surface what a match between Ideal and Regular you is, but to be as clear as possible, the match needs to be worked out in more detail. To do this, let us consider Regular and Ideal Anne.

Regular Anne holds conative attitudes towards particular things. She might hold conative attitudes towards a range of things, from her preference for chocolate cake, to her disapproval of abortion. As we saw on Blackburn's account, one way to view Anne's attitudes is on the staircase

of emotional and practical ascent. But Anne would not be happy with the misunderstanding that her attitude towards chocolate cake is anything like her attitude towards abortion. They are both conative; both have sentiment at their core, but that is where the similarity stops. How is the quasi-realist to reassure Anne that an expressivist treatment of her discourse will not trivialise her view of abortion?

When we look to Blackburn's account above we can use his distinction between preferences and stable attitudes. Recall that on his view a stable attitude is one which we are set against changing. He writes that when contemplating a change in our preference for liking ice-cream, we would not be upset by this (1998, p. 67). But when contemplating a change in our attitude toward abortion - suppose we imagine switching from disapproval of abortion to approval of it – we would be very upset indeed. We are, Blackburn claims, set against the change of our stable attitudes. We hold them strongly sometimes with intense emotional feeling, something without, but in both cases with a practical aspect. We may, for example, wish to block, or punish a wrongdoer. No such intensity combines with our preferences.

The boundaries between our preferences and stable attitudes will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. For now, the above should serve as a sketch of what the kind of attitude we have in moral discourse is; it is stable, we may struggle to see how it could be revised, and we would also struggle against its revision. Let us now return to Anne and see how, given the above, moral discourse can be explained by the ideal quasi-realist.

According to ideal quasi-realism when Anne expresses a stable judgement she is expressing approval of the match between her regular judgement about euthanasia being wrong, and her ideal judgement that euthanasia is wrong. It is the match between Ideal Anne's attitude towards



euthanasia and Regular Anne's attitude towards euthanasia that generates approval or disapproval of euthanasia.

To understand what the match between Regular and Ideal Anne amounts to we need only think of an agreement between two different persons and make a comparison. Imagine that both Caroline and Sara think that passive euthanasia is morally wrong and they say as much to each other. Further, suppose that their judgements are both stable (they are not merely saying something off the cuff). Leaving aside the more complex views of Blackburn, Gibbard, and Ideal Quasi-Realism for now, we will give Sara and Caroline's conversation an emotivist treatment where, *a la* Charles L. Stevenson, we interpret Sara and Caroline's judgements about passive euthanasia as disapproval of passive euthanasia.<sup>9</sup>

Stevenson claims that when we disagree in attitude it is because we cannot satisfy both or more of the attitudes in question (Stevenson, 1948 p. 2; Boisvert, 2016). We should read "satisfy" in terms of whether one person could coherently hold both attitudes in question. If, for example, Sara and Caroline disagreed about euthanasia; suppose the former thought it was morally right and the latter thought it was morally wrong, their attitudes would clash. Sara would approve of euthanasia, whereas Caroline would disapprove. Their attitudes could not both be satisfied because Sara could not both approve and disapprove of euthanasia, and nor could Caroline.

In contrast, agreement in attitude between Sara and Caroline would amount to both attitudes being coherently held (Boisvertt, 2016; Stevenson, 1944, p. 4 – 5). If Sara and Caroline are evaluating the same object, and if we suppose they can either have a verdict of approval or

<sup>9</sup> The simplicity in this instance is to drive home the claim that agreement in attitudes is akin to Stevenson's (1944) disagreement in attitudes. The extra levels of more complex theories would not get us to our point any quicker.

disapproval. Then either their both approving or both disapproving would be an agreement because it is obvious that there is no incoherence in doing so.

The above can help us understand what a match of attitudes is according to the ideal quasi-realist. We can think of a match of attitudes as similar to Stevenson's agreement in attitude, but an agreement for Stevenson can also amount to the interlocuters having no incoherent attitudes. That is, Sara and Caroline can still agree if Caroline approves of x and Sara approves of y, or if Caroline approves of x and Sara disapproves of y and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> I will be stricter than Stevenson here and suggest that matching attitudes cannot be as broad as an agreement in attitudes. A match, on my view, must be towards the same object (event, act, person, situation). By marking the difference between a match in attitudes and by making use of Stevenson's (1944) broader view of an agreement in attitude, we can make a helpful distinction between judgements and sensibilities.

The ideal quasi-realist agrees with Blackburn's sketch of a moral sensibility. On Blackburn's view a moral sensibility is a combination of input from the world around us and a desire, attitude or sentiment as the output. The input does not have to be purely descriptive, Blackburn claims that the input could be an awareness of one's surroundings. He writes "A man may respond to perceived features without realising that they are the ones responsible for his reactions. For example, we often do not know what we find funny in a situation" (Blackburn, 1984, p. 192, footnote 6). A moral sensibility, then, is not simply something conative that arises spontaneously, it is a combination of an attitude which is tied to a descriptive belief about the world.

<sup>10</sup> Although I don't take this to be agreement precisely, and a better term for this would be compatibility in attitude.

The ideal quasi-realist draws on Blackburn's account of a moral sensibility for her own view. On her view, like Blackburn's, the world serves as the input. Whether in terms of beliefs, or awareness of the situation they find themselves in.<sup>11</sup> Descriptive beliefs about the world make up the input for Regular Anne. She would know relevant things about the world; empirical theories and the like. These descriptive beliefs would inform her about the world around her, and would, following Hume, change her desire for something if she was mistaken about anything. For example, if Anne desired the glass of water in front of her, but the glass in front of her was actually a glass of gin. Anne would, presumably, no longer desire to drink the glass of liquid because it's gin. She would, however, still be motivated to drink a glass of water, her desire to do this has not disappeared. What has changed is her descriptive belief about a particular glass of liquid.

We assume that descriptive beliefs represent the world roughly as it is; if I see a gate in front of me, I know not to try to walk through it as if it's not there. A moral sensibility, then, has descriptive beliefs about the world as its input, and projected evaluation as its output. This is, of course, still plain old projectivism. Our evaluations about the world are projections of our reactions towards it. On Hume's view, we project our disapproval or approval onto the world, and the upshot is a moral judgement. The ideal quasi-realist does not stray too far from the projectivist's story of attitudes. She accepts that descriptive beliefs about the world are input, and evaluations are output. In other words, she accepts the notion of a moral sensibility with an input/output function. Her view, however, adapts this account.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, although, for example, David McNaughton (McNaughton, 1988) has argued that quasi-realism cannot fit with particularism. The "awareness" of the world is reminiscent of Lawrence's Blum's (1991) description of morally salient features of a situation, whereby noticing that the pregnant women should be given your seat is part of our moral thinking, not simply derived from moral principles. Beliefs or awareness such as "the dog is in pain" and "there is a dog to my right". To understand what a moral sensibility is let us imagine it in terms of Anne expressing a stable judgement.

Consider Anne again, but this time she sees someone kicking a dog in the street. Her descriptive beliefs might be the following; a man is kicking a dog in the street, the dog is to the left of me, the dog is in pain. There will be more of these beliefs, of course, but this should suffice to understand my point. What happens on the ordinary projectivist view is that Anne will disapprove of what she is seeing, and then form a judgement that the man who kicked the dog is morally wrong.

What is Anne doing according to the quasi-realist? She is reacting to the world around her, but she does not react in a vacuum. She reacts within an evaluative and normative space built up over time. It is not the case that an event in the world necessarily produces a specific moral evaluation. If this were strictly the case, then we would not be expressivists at all, but sensibility theorists.

Sensibility theory, which, like projectivism, finds its roots in Hume's sentimentalism, differs from projectivism in two key ways. First, sensibility theorists like McDowell (1998), claim that moral judgements express beliefs, rather than attitudes. They claim that moral properties are akin to secondary properties, such that, morality, like redness, is a real property of an object, but to see such properties is to see the world through a human lens. The ball is red qua being human, much like murder is wrong qua being human.

Rather, for the quasi-realist, Anne has a set of moral sensibilities; a set of habits of reaction (Blackburn, 1998). Her reaction to the dog being kicked in the street is not out of the blue, it has been built by her set of moral sensibilities. So far so good, but this is not yet anything new. The moral sensibilities are more than a simply input/output function, they are themselves stable. The claim that moral sensibilities are stable would seem implausible if one viewed them as stand-alone description and attitude pairs, but of course, our moral attitudes are not singular in this

way. We evaluate within a set of values. Blackburn invokes Neurath's boat example to explain how we evaluate among evaluations. If a boat is rotten, we do not remove every plank of the boat at once to repair it. We would have no boat if we did this. Instead, we remove and replace boards one at a time. Replacing and renewing as the boat moves forwards.

As we have seen the quasi-realist story of what Anne is doing when she approves of *x* is approval of whatever sensibility would or does approve *x*. In contrast, the ideal quasi-realist story of what Anne is doing when she approves of *x* shifts approval from a sensibility that would approve of *x*, to approval of a match between her own input/output moral sensibility and Ideal Anne's input/output moral sensibility.

The difference between their sensibilities is key. Although Anne and Ideal Ann have the same input from the world (awareness and beliefs about a situation) their sorting of the input information is different. Regular Anne, we may suppose, may make judgements with some biases, Ideal Anne would not. Ideal Anne is equipped with various processes that we take to be crucial for reasoning well: a lack of bias, relevant information about the situation including relevant scientific and psychological theories. In addition, Ideal Anne would be impartial and view the moral object (be it a person, event, or act) with an equal consideration of interests between all parties including Regular Anne.

Ideal Anne is behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance (Rawls, 2005). Anne, then, has two points of view to consider. The first is her own interests and knowledge of herself and her life. The second is an impartial version of herself. Ideal Anne is ideal in terms of her reasoning and processes of reasoning, she is impartial and free from bias. But this does not mean she is devoid of an understanding of emotion. She would be aware of what pain is and what suffering is. She would know that to be a human being means that one seeks purpose and meaning. She would know

that we are social beings. All that's being filtered out in the name of impartiality is the knowledge of her standing in the situation that is evaluated.

The above is a departure, but not a separation from, both Adam Smith (Smith and Haakonssen, 2002) and Hume (Hume and Schneewind, 1983) (Hume and Mossner, 1985). On Smith's view we must put ourselves in the other (relevant) person's shoes. He writes:

“By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (Smith and Haakonssen, 2002, p. 13).

For Smith, we must become the object of our sympathy to sympathise with him. Hume's view also employs the notion of sympathy, but on his account sympathising is done in terms of seeing oneself in another's shoes. We sympathise in this way because we are in, what Hume calls, the common point of view. When discussing the common point of view Blackburn quotes Hume “one man's ambition is not another's ambition; nor will the same event or object satisfy both: but the humanity of one man is the humanity of every one; and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures”<sup>12</sup> (Blackburn, 1998, p. 201).

For Hume, we sympathise when we are employing the common point of view. When we sympathise with another, we feel the same pleasure or displeasure as the person originally affected by a particular trait. The key difference between Hume and Smith on sympathy, then, is

<sup>12</sup> I've only selected the end of what Blackburn quotes here.

that on Smith's view one imagines the feelings of others, and on Hume's one shares in their feelings. The difference is between imagining someone's pleasure, and feeling pleasure yourself.

Now, ideal quasi-realism is a metaethical theory, but it is also an expressivist one. And if it is to say what we are doing when we voice our moral judgements, then it must also explain some of the moral psychology behind it as well. We shall move away from sympathy, however, because our aim is not to expand on Hume and Smith's view, nor offer an alternative. Instead, the discussion of sympathy is helpful insofar as it explains what it means to say Ideal Anne is impartial and how far we can think about others when we project our attitudes.

Whereas for Smith and Hume one either feels the same way, or imagines how the other feels, I will suggest, in line with Smith, that when we think about Ideal You, we imagine it from the perspective of Ideal You observing Regular You and any other people in a moral situation. The situation itself is closed. That is to say, Ideal You does not have to imagine everyone impartially, only those in the situation itself. Ideal You still understands regular you and everything that makes you an individual, but they take a step back from that information.

When I claim that my attitude is stable, I mean that my attitude and Ideal Me's attitude match. Given there is a match between me and Ideal me, and that Ideal Me has impartiality, a lack of bias, and full knowledge of the situation, I take the match to mean that my attitude could not currently be improved further. If there is no match, I understand from this that my attitude could be improved further.

The match, however, does not have to be understood in terms of a belief. The match between attitudes can be understood as a strict version of an agreement in attitude. The agreement in attitudes generates approval. Why? Because we already find the processes of the ideal observer

admirable. Now, one might worry that we are at risk of a circular argument. Our opponent may ask why we find the processes of the ideal observer admirable and expect the answer to be linked, in some way, to morality. But this need not be so. We can suggest, instead, that ‘admirable’ in this case does not have to include within it moral approbation or sentiment.

Instead, admirable can be read as sound. This may seem a little strange at first blush, so let me explain. When we say the ideal observer’s methods are effective, we cannot side step the issue simply by saying “well, we aren’t praising the ideal observer” – the ideal version of you, the stripped down optimal version of you, is constituted by her methods and knowledge. Praising the methods, simply is a way of praising the observer.

Instead, we can face the problem head on and look at one of the foundations of the quasi-realist programme: its commitment to naturalism. It’s naturalism is broad, but it has clear connections with scientific theories. Indeed, as we’ll see, it’s the strong tie to a scientifically reputable evolutionary story which generates the mind-independence problem we find in the final chapter. We can, with this link to naturalism, look to scientific theories, in particular theories about good reasoning. In philosophy, too, we can look to sound reasoning rather than unsupported claims. We can say that the ideal observer’s reasoning is sound in the sense that its reasoning methods do not make any logical faux faux. The soundness may generate approval, but approval need not be moral. We can approve, then, of the methods of the ideal observer, in the same way we might approve of an elegant proof. Neither approval has a moral nature.

Let us see where we are with the theory so far. We have said that when we express a stable judgement we express approval for the match between your judgement and your ideal judgement. You approve of the methods of ideal you, because those methods are sound. So, the reason you morally approve of a match between your judgement and your ideal judgement is because if



there is a match, then that must be due to sound reasoning. When you doubt a moral judgement, there is a mismatch between Ideal You's judgement about x, and Regular You's judgement about x.

One might ask why particular evaluative outputs tend to be paired with particular descriptive beliefs; why those outputs rather than anything else? The question of why is, of course, a psychological question. And the answer is steeped in evolutionary history,<sup>13</sup> a full exploration of which would become a thesis length work itself. I will take it for granted that evolutionary theories do a fairly good job in explaining our moral development. As an upshot of this, I adopt the quasi-realist stance that moral evaluation was intended to coordinate action among social groups<sup>14</sup>.

What has coordination got to do with stable moral sensibilities? Much. If we assume an evolutionary story of coordination is roughly true and add to it the claim that we change our minds, develop and adapt our moral judgements in line with evidence. Then we end up with a view of morality which is open to adaption and change. Such a view is crucial to the quasi-realist's outlook. Our morality builds itself via experience and interaction with the world: it is built layer by layer. There are, of course, different views on just how much nature gives us versus experience. Hutchenson, for example, claims that morality is built into human nature ((Sinnott-Armstrong, 2008, p. 367), on his view we understand what right and wrong are, not via experience of the world, but by having a moral sense. Prinz writes "according to this tradition, we are by nature moral, and our concern for good and evil is as natural to us as our capacity to feel pleasure and pain" (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2008, p. 367).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this see Gibbard (1990) and Richard Joyce (Joyce, 2007) (2009). Both discuss evolution and its impact on moral development.

<sup>14</sup> See: (Blackburn, 1993, p. 168)

This view of morality does not lack for support in contemporary research. Cosmides & Tooby (Barkow, 1995) and Haidt & Joseph (Haidt and Joseph, 2004), for example, hold the view, much like Hutcheson, that morality is part and parcel of our natures. Typically, this view is called Nativism. In contrast Prinz (Prinz, 2009) (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2008) and Nichols (Carruthers et al., 2005) argue that the arguments for there being an innate moral faculty, or an innate moral knowledge fail. We will explore the latter view in more depth in the Mind-Independence chapter. For now, the final section of the introduction will focus on the semantics of the ideal observer.

I take my inspiration for these semantics from Blackburn (Blackburn, 1984) who originally offered his account to solve the Frege-Geach problem. In addition, I draw on James Lenman's (Lenman, 2003) response to Michael Smith's paper "Evaluation, Uncertainty, and Motivation" (Smith, 2002a). Smith argues that the expressivist cannot accommodate all three features of moral discourse— evaluation, uncertainty, and motivation – on her account. Lenman argues that the expressivist can overcome Smith's challenge. In brief, Smith argues that the expressivist needs to accommodate certitude, robustness, and importance. My task at the end of this chapter is not to start another one on this problem, although I would like to explore it in the future. Rather, I want to draw attention to my development of both Blackburn – in terms of the "HI" semantics used – and Lenman – in terms of the incorporation of an ideal version of myself. Both have informed my ideal quasi-realism, the semantics of which, I'll sketch below.

a. "x is morally good" = Rachel approves of the match between her approval of x and an ideal version of herself approving of x:

1. Rachel H!x, HI Match in Attitudes with Ideal Rachel
2. Ideal Rachel H!x

3. H! (Rachel H!x and Ideal Rachel H!x)

b. “x is morally wrong” = Rachel approves of the match between her disapproval of x and an ideal version of herself disapproving of x

1. Rachel B!x, H! Match in Attitudes with Ideal Rachel

2. Ideal Rachel B!x

3. H! (Rachel B!x and Ideal Rachel B!x)

“I was wrong to think x is wrong” = Rachel disapproves of x, but in light a mismatch between Rachel and Ideal Rachel, she changes her mind and approves a match. One might wonder why this might happen. Well, Regular Rachel wants to get things right, in particular she wants to get things morally right. With this in mind, she understands that an ideal version of herself is going to get things right more often than she is. And so, some of the normative force of her judgements comes from what Ideal Rachel would say.

1. Rachel B!x, H! Match in Attitudes with Ideal Rachel

2. Ideal Rachel H!x

3. B! (Rachel B!x) and (H! Ideal Rachel Hx)

“I’m not sure if x is morally wrong” = Rachel disapproves of x, but there is no clear match or mismatch between her and the ideal version of her.

1. Rachel B!x, H! Match in Attitudes with Ideal Rachel
2. Ideal Rachel H!x or B!x

Now, of course, ideal quasi-realism is a theory in development and my hope for future research is to expand on the theory in papers and, if I'm lucky, a book. The key element of ideal quasi-realism is the approval of a strict agreement in attitudes between Ideal and Regular You.

Normative force, as I've said is delivered in part by Ideal You's approval or disapproval owing to their being ideal, but normative force also comes from the agreement itself. I shall leave the sketch of the theory here at present. In each subsequent chapter I give an ideal quasi-realist solution to the problems I address.

My title, 'Quasi-Realism: A Defence,' is in line with my overall project to defend quasi-realism from major challenges to its anti-realist foundations. I do this both in terms of close readings of Blackburn's quasi-realism, or by positing how ideal quasi-realism may help the expressivist cause. Let us now, then, turn to the first problem the quasi-realist must face; The Moral Attitude Problem.

# Chapter 1. The Moral Attitude Problem

## Introduction

“To establish projectivism would need a close exploration of the nature of the attitude which is spread on the world. This involves locating what it is about an attitude that makes it a moral one” (Blackburn, 1984, p. 189)

The moral attitude problem is not a convoluted problem, but this does not mean that it is easy to solve. Simply put, the moral attitude problem asks the expressivist what it is that makes an attitude moral rather than aesthetic, or a broad normative attitude. Simon Blackburn has two positions on whether the quasi-realist needs to solve the moral attitude problem. On the first position, he recognises that further development of his account of attitudes is required before we can deem his projectivism, which he later calls expressivism, a success (Blackburn, 1998, p. 77).

In his later work, he claims that an account of the moral attitude is not needed. He writes “analytical philosophers demand definitions, but I do not think it is profitable to seek a strict definition of ‘the’ moral attitude here. Practical life comes in many flavours [...]” (Blackburn, 1998, pp. 13 - 14). He claims that a strict definition cannot be given because there simply isn’t a strict definition to be had. As we saw in the previous chapter Blackburn locates moral attitudes on the practical and emotional staircase of ascent which ranges from mere preferences at the bottom to very strongly felt commitments at the top, but he does not point to a certain section of the staircase and declare that the cut off point for the moral versus the non-moral attitudes. Ethics, he writes, is “polymorphous” (1998, p. 14) it simply doesn’t admit of a singular moral attitude.

Both positions, however, are not, as one might suppose, contrary to one another. Despite appearances, Blackburn's second stance on the moral attitude problem does not withdraw his prior call for exploration of the nature of moral attitudes. Rather, his earlier position calls for an investigation into what makes an attitude moral. His second position denies that there is a singular moral attitude which has a strict definition. We can accept that there can be no one strict definition whilst also holding that we can investigate what makes any attitude moral, if at all . This way of understanding the problem does not remove the problem for the quasi-realist, instead it shifts the demand for a definition of the moral attitude to a characterisation of moral attitudes wherever they are – and however numerous they may be – on the staircase of emotional and practical ascent .

“*The Moral Attitude Problem*”, then, is a misnomer. We can still legitimately ask Blackburn for an explanation of moral attitudes, even if we deny that there is one moral attitude. Furthermore, we can query the denial that a quasi-realist treatment of a singular moral attitude is needed. Blackburn's claim that ethics is multifarious does not amount to an argument against the claim that the quasi-realist need not give a definition of the moral attitude. The quasi-realist needs to say more to establish this. My first task in this chapter will be to establish how we conceive of moral attitudes as opposed to aesthetic attitudes. This discussion should serve to show that the connotative core of an attitude – the notion that we express some kind of feeling - is not the only important aspect of the expressivist treatment of moral discourse. We must also consider the structure of the conative attitude to properly understand how the quasi-realist can solve both versions of the moral attitude problem.

Both tasks direct the over-arching project of this chapter. To complete both tasks I'll introduce two different versions of the moral attitude problem: Miller's version (2003), and Merli's version

(2007). The discussion of Miller's version of the problem will serve to explicate the first task, and I will argue that Miller's argument does not succeed. First, because we need to understand the structure of a stable attitude on Blackburn's account to fully understand his expressivism, and second his use of the open question argument can be challenged. I then turn to Merli's version of the problem where he introduces constraints on the quasi-realists solution to the problem. Merli claims that the solution cannot be under-determined, nor over determined, and he concludes that the quasi-realist cannot give an answer which satisfies his constraints. I argue, once more that Merli's argument depends on a focus on the conative aspects rather than the structural elements of attitudes which rule the conation. I introduce my own theory, ideal quasi-realism, which develops Blackburn's account and offers a structural solution to the moral attitude problem.

## **What Is The Moral Attitude Problem?**

The moral attitude problem strikes at the very thing which powers quasi-realism; expressivism. As we saw in chapter one quasi-realists aim to explain and justify our realist-sounding moral discourse. They aim to explain moral discourse by giving an expressivist gloss to our moral judgements. Expressivists claim that when we engage in moral discourse, we express a conative attitude, but the theory is not as simple as the claim that we express conative attitudes. There are different versions the theory, from Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism (1984, 1993, 1998) to Michael Ridge's hybrid ecumenical expressivism (2006 , 2014) The type of expressivism that is endorsed determines how the nature of conative attitudes are understood. In the first chapter we looked at two instances of an expressivist theory; Allan Gibbard's norm-expressivism, later his plan-expressivism, and Simon Blackburn's projectivist-expressivism. Since I am primarily concerned with Blackburn's expressivism - or at least, a Blackburn-esque expressivism - I shall, henceforth, read "conative attitude" in line with Blackburn's expressivism. In other words, I shall understand "conative attitude" to mean an attitude of either approval or disapproval.

The core of the moral attitude problem can be neatly packaged as a question: what is it that makes an attitude moral, rather than, for example, aesthetic? The central demand of the challenge is to give an explanation of the state of mind expressed by moral judgements. This problem, which is sometimes referred to as the specification problem (Köhler, 2013), has two different modes, all of which intersect.

Miller's version of the challenge, I will argue, can be solved by examining Blackburn's account of stability in more detail, and by rejecting the open question argument Miller uses. As we saw in chapter one, the aim of quasi-realism is to explain and justify our ordinary moral talk. The next section will discuss a few general assumptions the quasi-realist holds about moral discourse. In particular, I've chosen to focus on differences between everyday aesthetic discourse and moral discourse. The reason for my focus on aesthetic and moral discourse rather than another comparison is twofold: first, both discourses can be given an expressivist treatment. Whether such a treatment is successful for aesthetics is a different matter, and one beyond the scope of this thesis. What matters for this chapter is that we can conceive of a speaker understanding 'the painting is good' to mean "I approve of the painting". Of course, a thorough expressivist treatment of aesthetic discourse would be more complex than this, but for now all we need to get started is to imagine that one is possible. Indeed, one may want to go further than this and, like Huw Price (2013), propose a global expressivism. On this view we need not see such strict distinctions between discourses. The push against distinctive discourses is owed to Price's rejection of the bifurcation thesis; the claim that some declarative sentences express beliefs, and some express attitudes (Price et al., 2013, pp. 147–148)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The term "bifurcation thesis" is used by Robert Kraut (1990) in his discussion of Richard Rorty's pragmatism (1982).



## **Aesthetic Discourse and Moral Discourse**

The quasi-realist calls the discourse she wishes to explain “realist-sounding” and she interprets this as a discourse which includes notions of truth, objectivity, and moral authority. This chapter draws attention to the claim that the boundaries we assume a discourse to have is also a feature of that discourse. We will look, then, at one of the assumptions we make about our everyday moral discourse: that different discourses have features which differentiate them. This is not quite the same as an exploration of the bifurcation thesis – that some discourses are non-cognitive and others are cognitive (Price et al., 2013). The bifurcation thesis is concerned with second order theories and meta-explanations. Instead, this section is not focused on our meta-theories that one discourse might be cognitive, and the other not. The focus is on our first order of assumptions for particular discourses and how those assumptions in the practise entail, or do not entail, assumptions in the meta-theory.

In other words, getting clear about our assumptions and what they mean for our ordinary moral talk will help us understand what, exactly, the quasi-realist has to explain and justify. In light of my aim, this section will not be a revision of our ordinary moral and aesthetic practise, but a story about how we assume both aesthetics and moral judgements are used by ordinary people. Explaining our everyday assumptions about the differences and similarities between aesthetic and moral discourse should motivate the moral attitude problem by showing that it is a challenge for any metaethical theory which wishes to explain our moral discourse rather than revise it.

Once we’ve looked at the differences between moral and aesthetic discourse we can assess whether an assumption about the separation of aesthetic and moral discourse means we must give a different meta-theory to understand it. I will argue that the evidence for supposing that there are differences between aesthetic and moral discourse lies in how they are practised. Of

course, if moral and aesthetic discourse is distinct, one might wish to give the former discourse an expressivist treatment, and the latter a realist treatment. Whether we can give aesthetic discourse a non-expressivist treatment, however, is beside the point. Our purpose in this section is not to suggest a realist discourse suits aesthetics, and if this is so, claim that moral discourse is metaethically distinct due to this. Instead, we want to claim that even if aesthetic discourse has an anti-realist explanation, the moral expressivist can still give a unique explanation for moral discourse. In other words, an expressivist treatment of moral talk, does not have to diminish the boundaries between discourses that we usually take for granted.

### Moral and Aesthetic Discourse: Behaviour

Suppose there is a moral issue, perhaps your community are debating the death penalty. You think it is morally wrong and you are confident your judgement is right. Your confidence (let us say for now) is due to empirical evidence: the suffering of prisoners and whether the death penalty is a deterrent for crime. You might try to get people to accept what you say and try different methods to achieve this. For example, you might make an emotional plea to people or you might argue in a calm manner stating empirical facts about different cases. You might engage with people who disagree, but given their views, decided to avoid them in the future. You might be unmoved by naysayers, ignore them, then condemn them. You might engage with those that disagree, but stand firm in your own convictions. The things you might do to persuade others are numerous.

The quasi-realist holds that the function of moral judgements is to persuade, command, and coordinate social groups. The notion that moral discourse is to coordinate action between people is born out of the quasi-realist's naturalist view about the development of ethics. On this view morality developed due to evolutionary pressures. Blackburn (1998) notes that his view of

morality's development is in agreement with Gibbard's (1990). I shall follow them both in accepting an evolutionary story about the emergence and progression of ethics.<sup>16</sup> The evolutionary story about ethics then generates an understanding of ethics which sees it as ultimately a persuasive enterprise.

One thing that we can plausibly assume from the function claim – the view that morality had developed due to having a particular purpose – is the claim that we engage with others about ethical matters: we disagree, or agree, we argue with one another, we tell others they are wrong to judge a situation a particular way. We do hold that we're right about our judgements. If we are unsure of our moral judgements, we might be persuaded to another's view. Imagine, for example, the meat eater who has contemplated vegetarianism but is unsure on whether to be vegetarian whilst being unsure about whether meat is ethically permissible. An appeal to an argument for vegetarianism might just do the trick. This way of looking at ethics is nothing more than thinking about why we engage in ethics at all. And if we engage in ethics not to persuade others because we think we're right, or if we engage in it to not discuss with others at all, then the enterprise of ethics would soon cease.<sup>17</sup>

I am going to push further on the following claim: we want others to accept our moral judgements because we think they are right. This claim, as it stands, doesn't help us to draw a line between the moral and the aesthetic, but as we'll see, a development of it will. We saw earlier that some aesthetic judgements have the same features as moral judgements. If John insists Magritte is a terrible artist, we would expect Smith, who disagrees to argue for a contrary claim.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this topic, please see Chapter five "Quasi-Realism, Evolution, and a Debunking Problem".

<sup>17</sup> Thankfully, for those who insist on ethics being about what the individual thinks is right and nothing more, they still have others to debate with due to rejection, or at the very least doubt about this view. An easy way to test this is to ask a group of students who claim morality "is up to the person" whether they think someone who thinks cold-blooded murder is morally right. I will also leave aside those who claim that there is no right answer. Someone who holds this type of view – who might be called, if Boghossian (2013) imagined his B-Relativist doing ethics – might insist they have no ethical position, but nevertheless, their nihilism is a stance on ethical discourse. With some irony, I assume they think moral nihilism is the right view.

Why would Smith do this? He would do it because he thinks his judgement about Magritte - is the right judgement to have. On this example, it looks like arguing for our judgements about x because we think they are right is a shared practise between both aesthetics and morality.

We might worry that the distinction in practise, given the discussion above, cannot be made; but all is not lost for the quasi-realist. She can also look at the consequences of aesthetic or moral judgements followed. That is, she can look to the normative aspects of such judgements.

Suppose Bob fails to agree that x aesthetic claim is correct, and suppose that everyone else thinks x aesthetic claim is correct. The most extreme consequences for Bob might be derision from those who take their judgement about art to be beyond criticism. Bob's claim, however, would not be dangerous for him to keep. Others would not view him as a menace to society. The people closest to Bob would not make every attempt to change his mind. Strangers would not threaten physical punishment, and so forth. This is not exclusive to painting, people argue about their favourite band or song, but the social consequences would be perhaps light teasing, not condemnation. Hatred would be misplaced in this context.

Even if we imagine Bob as part of a wine-tasting group where on an otherwise ordinary Saturday Bob claims that all red wine tastes like beer, he might be thrown out of the group – a form of social exclusion – but he would not be ostracised by his entire community; his family, co-workers, and his friends. Now, we don't have to imagine community ostracization as something which happens all at once. Instead, social exclusion of this kind can be thought of as a conditional.

SOCIAL CONDITIONAL: if you knew Bob thought x about y, then you would be very likely to shun him.

Let us start filling in the place markers with a moral case. Suppose that Bob claims that brutal murder is morally justifiable. You argue with him and attempt to show him that he is wrong. We can imagine that the argument you have with Bob would have a higher intensity than your aesthetic argument with him because the stakes are higher, not just for yourself, but for others too. On the former, Bob might be a risk to your life, on the latter, he simply disagrees with you about your reaction to a work of art. Even if we take an example of a moral judgement which we might consider to have lower stakes, we would still have enough investment in it to draw the practical difference between the aesthetic judgement and the moral one.

Take, for example, the case of abortion. Suppose Bob opposes it, and you are for it. Of course, this is a crude summation of a nuanced debate, but we must be careful not to stray too far from the topic of the chapter. The stakes are higher in the abortion debate (whichever side you defend) because the object of the debate is a human being. And if assume that human life is valuable qua human life, then any discourse which takes the human being as its object, rather than an inanimate object, is *ceteris paribus*, discussing something with higher stakes. An appeal to the practise which we are attempting to explain is perfectly within the remit of the quasi-realist. One must start an investigation somewhere, and the quasi-realist chooses to conduct their metaethics with both feet firmly placed in the natural world. There is, in short, nowhere else for a naturalist metaethics to begin. Offering a story of what people do as the starting point for a theory doesn't presume the split between ethics and aesthetics, but it can explain the intuitions for such a split.

So far, then, we have discussed the split between aesthetics and morality in terms of how people typically behave when faced with ethical or aesthetic judgements. If this story is right, then aesthetic and ethical discourse are treated differently in practise, then this motivates the moral attitude problem which asks for a metaethical explanation for the distinction.

## **The Motivation For Miller's Moral Attitude Problem**

Miller (2003) claims that the quasi-realist must give a characterisation of the type of attitude we express when we engage in moral discourse (2003, p. 88). As we saw in section two above we treat ethical and aesthetic judgements differently; we view the former as warranting a higher level of emotional and perhaps even physical response than the latter. If the quasi-realist can't give such a characterisation, then she will fail in her aim to explain and justify the realist-seeming features of our moral discourse. A failure of this kind would threaten to topple the quasi-realist programme. It would be clear that it is not equipped to achieve its philosophical aims and, as such, quasi-realism would become redundant. This problem, then, should not be ignored, and a satisfactory solution to the problem should both vindicate the quasi-realist, and furnish us with a deeper understanding of quasi-realism and what it is capable of explaining.

Miller (2003, p. 93) argues that the expressivist cannot simply accept a vague overlapping of our aesthetic or moral attitudes because acceptance of such vagueness is not the problem. The problem is that there is no account of the moral attitude at all (2003, p. 93). Further, for the expressivist to claim that our aesthetic and moral attitudes overlap, and by how much and to what extent, they would have to know what, precisely, is doing the overlapping. For example, if I have two rugs in my living room, one blue, the other red, and I say "both rugs are overlapping" you'll understand me to mean that either the blue or the red rug is partially resting upon the other. If you press me for more details about exactly how the rugs are overlapping, I can tell you to what extent; 'just the corner of the red rug is over the bottom of the blue rug'. If it isn't clear what the difference is between the red rug and the blue, then the claim that there might be an overlap between the two is unclear at best, and meaningless at worst.

In his later work Blackburn claims the quasi-realist need not give a “strict definition” of the moral attitude (1998, p. 13 – 14). Miller targets two aspects of the quasi-realist account of attitudes to show that an account of the moral attitude must be given on pain of programme failure: the emotional staircase, and stable attitudes. I will sketch an account of both before we move to Miller’s objections.

Blackburn asks us to imagine a staircase where each step of the staircase represents a stage of increased strength, sometimes in terms of emotional output (disliking to hating), or in terms of practical action (restraining, punishing). At the bottom of the staircase are preferences, for example, the preference for chocolate cake over victoria sponge. Preferences such as these are not something we typically hold onto very strongly when confronted. If you insist Victoria sponge is more delicious, I might tell you I prefer chocolate cake instead, but it would be unusual for me to be hostile towards you because of your preference. In contrast, the higher up the staircase we go, the stronger the feelings and conviction. Very strong feelings, for example, anger at x are also coupled with a demand that John, like you, should also be angry at x.

If you find that John does not share in your feelings about x, you will feel anger towards him too. Of course, we might encounter a person who does become very angry and hostile if you don’t share their cake preferences, but this type of case can be ignored. If we understood the person and his very strong feelings about cake seriously, we would, to some extent at least, be revising what we take to be moral. And since we do find the hostile cake lover to be very unusual indeed, we need not mind him. Instead, we should understand Blackburn’s staircase as a typical or general picture of how preferences and very strong convictions are linked to morality or not. Deviant cases should not trouble us too much.

The staircase gives us a framework for understanding our moral judgements. Those judgements which I take to be moral are going to be the ones that I feel strongly about, or the ones which I think have strong normative force. Typically moral judgements engender action to appease them (1998, p 9). You might well think that there are obvious cases that will involve the top of the staircase which are clearly moral, and those at the bottom are not. But the picture is not as clear cut as this, and it is a much wider picture than the staircase metaphor first implies.

First, there are some moral judgements which are not strongly felt; we may think a particular principle is morally correct, and we may want to say we express an attitude in favour of it. It is not a preference because it is not something you would take dismiss easily, but nor is it something which, upon contemplation, you feel great anger or any emotion towards. These judgements, Blackburn claims, are a type of principles we all share, something which he calls an ethic of “perfect calm”(1998, p 13). The sort of judgement which would fit into this category is much like the one we’ve been discussing; one that issues a moral ought, but does not do it with anger. In cases like this the staircase is practical rather than emotional, and we can allow for judgements which call for restraints on actions or persons without needing a particularly strong feeling attached to them. For Blackburn, the staircase is both practical and emotional, it sometimes points towards a very strong emotional reaction, with practical upshots. Or it can point towards a calm judgement which doesn’t have ties to strong emotion, but still retains the practical constraints any moral judgement demands of us.

One may wonder if emotions or practicality have priority on Blackburn’s view. They may claim that if some judgements can only have practical aspects rather than emotional ones, does this mean practical function takes priority for our moral judgements rather than emotion. If this is the case, they may start to worry for Blackburn’s expressivism; if practicality is paramount, the worry might go, then why not attach it to rationality and eschew emotions as important for the



staircase. In other words, why not gut the emotional aspect from the expressivist model? Aside from removing expressivist's keystone, this sort of claim misunderstands the relationship between the practical and the emotional for Blackburn's expressivism.

One reason why Blackburn rejects giving 'the' definition of a moral attitude is because, he claims, morality is multifaceted. Blackburn quotes Ryle who writes "tempers, habits, dispositions, moods, inclinations, impulses, sentiments, feelings, affections, thoughts, reflections, opinions, principles, prejudices, imaginations and fancies" (1966, p. 182). Seeking the definition of the moral attitude ignores that morality includes numerous attitudes. Our lives are undoubtedly full of many of facets. We sometimes follow principles, sometimes our sentiments take hold, sometimes we have the luxury of reflecting abstractly on a situation. Blackburn's claim is that moral discourse is multifaceted, and for the expressivist to explain moral discourse, she too had to allow for no single definition of what explains the discourse she seeks to justify. Expressivism accommodates judgements which are not always coupled with very strong emotions, it can accommodate cold judgements by highlighting their practical function but it does not follow that because Blackburn allows for some judgements to be explained on the emotional and practical staircase as not dealing in strong anger or disgust that they are thus cut off from the emotion entirely.

Now that we have an understanding of an important aspect of Blackburn's expressivism, I will move onto the first mode of the problem. In this section I will also explain another crucial aspect of Blackburn's account: stable attitudes. Since, however, I take the staircase and stability to be intertwined, I will save my discussion of stability for my response to Miller. His argument, given that we've discussed the staircase of emotion and practical ascent, will be understandable without an exegesis on stable attitudes beforehand.

## **Miller's Moral Attitude Problem**

Miller (2003) considers and rejects two answers the quasi-realist might give to solve the moral attitude problem. On the first answer, Miller considers how an emotional staircase-ascent approach only leads to circularity (2003, p. 89). On the second answer, Miller argues that Blackburn's account of stable attitudes is subject to the open question argument and thus fails to provide a solution. I will deal with both solutions and objections in turn.

### **The First Answer: Emotional and Practical Staircase of Ascent**

Miller writes that the quasi-realist can represent non-cognitive approval as the following:

$H!(x)$  – where “H!” represents approval, and where “(x)” represents the object of the approval.

Equally, for disapproval we can use the representation “ $B!(x)$ ” – Boo, or disapproval, of x. When we get to a more complex attitude, for example an attitude about murder, the representation is more complex:

“ $B!(\text{Murder}) \ \& \ H!(\text{Everyone has the attitude } B!(\text{Murder}))$ ”

The representation above can be read as your disapproval of murder and our approval of anyone who also shares in your disapproval of murder (Miller, 2003, p. 89). This doesn't yet give us a solution, because the disapproval and approval could, Miller claims, be aesthetic. He proposes another version of the representation where  $M$  represents a complex moral attitude (Miller, 2003, p. 89):

$$B!_M(\text{murder}) = \text{df } B(\text{murder}) \ \& \ H!(\text{Everyone has the attitude } B!(\text{murder})) \text{ (2003, p. 89)}$$

But even this representation needs further refinement, because your wanting others to share in your disapproval of murder isn't the same as wanting everyone to share in your disapproval of any type. You specifically want them to disapprove morally (rather than, say, aesthetically). So the representation should look something like this:

$$B!_M(\text{murder}) = \text{df } B!(\text{murder}) \ \& \ H!(\text{everyone has the attitude } B!_M(\text{murder})) \text{ (2003, p. 89)}$$

The above representation, as Miller claims, is clearly circular. The complex moral attitude cannot be in part explained by another complex moral attitude. It looks like Blackburn cannot rely on emotional and practical ascent alone, but that does not mean his expressivism fails. Let us now turn to the stable attitudes answer.

## **The Second Answer: Stable Attitudes**

Miller begins by quoting Blackburn: “If we imagine the general field of an agent’s concerns, his or her values might be regarded as those that he or she is also concerned to preserve” (1998, p. 67). Once again, Miller gives a representation of the attitudes, this time including the notion of stability just quoted:

“ $H!_M(\text{Murder}) = \text{df } (H!(x) \ \& \ H!(\text{stability of } [H!(x)]))$ ” (2003, p. 90)

On the above representation the moral attitude is defined by both approval of an object - we could also swap approval for disapproval on this representation - combined with the notion of stability. An approving stable attitude on the above representation is something you would not want to give up easily. If your attitude is stable you are likely to not expect any revision to it. You very strongly hold your approval of  $x$  and you would resist changing your attitude. Miller claims that the stability definition falls foul of the open question argument, but before we look at his argument in more detail we would be wise to understand what the open question argument is.

## **The Open Question Argument: What It Is and What It Is Not**

Often, Moore’s open question argument (Moore and Baldwin, 1993) is understood to be about the conceivability of a question with the following framework: “is  $x$  really  $y$ ?”. Although this is on the right track, the argument itself is both more complex and understood in different ways. As such, we shall have to unpack what some of the major interpretations of the open question

argument are. There are two main ways of interpreting what Moore meant; the first is by taking his argument to be against identity claims like “good” and “N” ((Feldman, 2005). Sturgeon (1992) takes this to be a reductive identity. On his view the open question argument is about whether the claim that “good” is identical to “pleasure” can be revealed to be not identical due to an application of an open question, for example “x is good, but is x pleasure?”. Sturgeon argues that the open question argument fails because it is clear that there are cases where an identity statement does not entail synonymy (Feldman, 2005, p. 27). For example, we might give an identity statement like “good = pleasure” but that doesn’t mean, even if the identity statement is open, that “good” and “pleasure” are synonymous. We can’t say, Sturgeon claims, that simply because there is an open question about whether pleasure is identical to good, that pleasure is not good (Feldman, 2005, p. 27). Feldman summarises the argument Sturgeon’s argument below:

“OQA-1

1. It is an open question whether 'Pleasure = Goodness' is true.
2. If it is an open question whether 'Pleasure = Goodness' is true, then  
 $\neg(\text{Pleasure} = \text{Goodness})$ .
3. If  $\neg(\text{pleasure} = \text{goodness})$ , then PH is false. 4. Therefore, PH is false.” (2005, p. 27)

Sturgeon (1992) rejects premise 2. Feldman (2005) agrees that premise 2 is indefensible; there are clear cases like the Morning Star and the Evening Star which show it is false. We can understand the identity claim, he claims, but we might still doubt whether it’s true (Feldman, 2005, p. 27). Doubt, then, is the focus for Sturgeon’s interpretation, but it is not enough to secure the success

of the open question argument. Rather than this be a problem for Moore, Feldman argues that Sturgeon's argument is based on a misinterpretation. He agrees that if premise two fails, so does the argument, but he does not think Sturgeon's version of the OQA is Moore's argument.

Feldman argues that Moore's argument is a combination of the rule of composability and comparison of the meanings of two close sentences. The rule of compositionality looks at meaning as something constituted by the parts of the sentence. Moore uses this rule and compares sentences to see if there is a similar meaning between them. The argument goes, that if we have two sentences which we've examined in terms of compositionality and we find that there is one word which is dissimilar then the meaning of the sentences is different. So, if we were to propose two sentences and claim they had a same meaning we would expect them to have the same complexity and pattern to their arrangement (Feldman, 2005, p. 33)

Next we turn to how Miller understands the OQA. This interpretation of the open question argument focuses on predicates rather than identity claims. Feldman calls this the "self-predication interpretation" and it is advanced by Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton (Darwall et al., 1992). On this view the open question argument morphs into a question about intelligibility. If two terms shared the same meaning, then asking whether y was x would not be intelligible to us; it would amount to us claiming that if there is a property P which is the meaning of the term X, then asking "is P (predicatively) N" not intelligible (Feldman, 2005, p. 29). The sentence, "is pleasure good?", however, is intelligible to us, so it's an open question whether pleasure is good, so goodness and pleasure seem to be separate and not mean the same thing (Darwall et al., 1992, p. 116). Feldman outlines the self-predication argument below:

“OQA-2

1. The question whether pleasantness is good is intelligible.
2. If the question whether pleasantness is good is intelligible, then 'good' does not mean pleasantness.
3. If 'good' does not mean pleasantness, then PH is false. 4. Therefore, PH is false.”

(2005, p. 29)

Feldman claims that it does not follow that being able to ask an intelligible question about a definition does not mean that the definition is true or not (Feldman, 2005, p. 29) He writes “From the fact that the question ‘is pleasantness good’ is intelligible, nothing follows about whether pleasantness is the meaning of the word ‘good’” (2005, p. 29).

## **Miller and The Open Question Argument**

Miller’s version of the open question argument builds on Thomas Baldwins’ (Moore and Baldwin, 1993) and the (Darwall et al., 1992) version. Both, according to Miller, focus on an internalist claim (that, roughly, if you think x is good, you will be motivated to do x).

Miller’s internalist claim, however, internalism with a twist. The motivation is not, as it normally is, focused on action. Miller is not concerned per se with your motivated to act<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Of course, one might claim that the demand for others to share your attitude is also an action. It might, because it is a demand for others to adopt something they would not ordinarily adopt, an action of sorts. I’d like to make a distinction between demands for someone to share your mental attitude toward something, and a demand for a physical action. The primary thing I take to distinguish between demands for mental change and demands for physical change are that a demand for physical action would, in most cases, lead to some physical change in the world. A demand for mental change (so, your changing your attitude towards x) would not, on its own, lead to some physical change in the world.

if you judge that x is bad or good. Rather, he claims that if we judge that x is bad or good, we would also expect you to demand that others share the same attitude towards x. To make this distinction clear I'll refer to Miller's revised version of the internalism claim as "adapted internalism". Let us look at Miller's argument in more detail below. He writes:

"(15) There is a conceptual link between judging that Jones has judged that x is good (bad) and expecting Jones to be disposed, *ceteris paribus*, to demand that you share his non-cognitive sentiments towards x.

(16) Competent and reflective speakers of English are convinced that they are able to imagine clear-headed (and otherwise psychologically healthy beings) who judge that Jones expresses the sentiment ( $H!_M(x)$ ), but who fail to expect Jones to be disposed, *ceteris paribus*, to demand that they share this non-cognitive sentiment towards x.

[...](17) If there were no conceptual link between judging that Jones has expressed  $H!_M(x)$  and expecting Jones to be disposed, *ceteris paribus*, to demand that you share this non-cognitive sentiment towards x, we would expect competent and reflective speakers of English to have the conviction described in (16)

So:

(18) Unless there is some other explanation of the conviction described in (16), we



are entitled to conclude that there is no conceptual link between judging that Jones has expressed  $H!_M(x)$  and expecting Jones to demand that you share this non-cognitive sentiment towards  $x$ .

So:

(19) Unless there is some other explanation of the conviction described in (16), we are entitled to conclude that the judgement that Jones has judged that  $x$  is good is not identical to the judgement that Jones has expressed in  $H!_M(x)$ .

So:

(20) Unless there is some other explanation of the conviction described in (16), we are entitled to conclude that judging that  $x$  is good cannot be analysed in terms of the expression of  $H!_M(x)$ " (2003, p. 90 – 91).

The argument turns on premise (16), where Miller challenges the quasi-realist with adapted internalism. Recall that Miller, after having argued that the staircase of emotional and practical ascent account cannot respond successfully to the open question argument, then turns Blackburn's account of stable attitudes as a possible solution to the problem. Let us remind ourselves of Miller's representation of stability again:

“ $H!_M(\text{Murder}) = \text{df } (H!(x) \ \& \ H!(\text{stability of } [H!(x)]))$ ” (2003, p. 90)

Stability according to the above amounts to approval of  $x$  and the approval of stability of your approval towards  $x$ . The way of reading stability, however, leaves much out of Blackburn’s account. First, it does not properly specify what stability is in terms of attitudes. Part of the reasoning behind this may well be an economical definition, but until we understand what Blackburn means by stability, we have little chance of understanding what it is to approve of an attitude being stable. For Blackburn, the core meaning of stability is that we are reluctant to revise the attitudes we take to be stable. Indeed, Miller admits this much earlier on in his argument (2003, p. 89). So this detail about stability will not be new to him, but his reading of stability, I will argue, leaves out crucial features of Blackburn’s account. To argue for this, we will need to first remind ourselves about what a stable attitude is in more detail.

Stable attitudes are attitudes which have a low probability of future revision, and we tend to be confident that we are right to hold those attitudes. Blackburn writes “To hold a value, then, is typically to have a relatively stable disposition to conduct practical life and practical discussion in a particular way: it is to be disposed or set in that way, and notably to be set against change in this respect” (1998, p. 67). Stability, then, includes a resistance to change that we don’t tend to find in preferences or likes.<sup>19</sup>

Blackburn discusses stability in terms of the staircase of emotional and practical assent. It may be, he claims, that once we get to somewhere near the top that we are hostile to those

<sup>19</sup> This resistance to change and what it means is important, and I offer a full overview of Blackburn’s view of stability and how it turns on possibility and probability and the differences therein. For the purposes of this chapter, knowing that stability includes a resistance to change is sufficient for the argument.

who don't share our view. We might, in cases where we have a firm attitude, react differently to people who hold what we take to be a morally abhorrent view. For example, Blackburn writes that if you hold a repugnant moral view like - 'hurting children for fun is acceptable' - he will oppose you as well as your view.

He writes "[...] my opposition may show itself in any number of ways, from avoiding your company, to advising others to do so, to seeking to change you, to constraining you as I can, or deploying social and legal pressures of all kinds against you" (1998, p. 12).

Although Miller considers the emotional staircase and stability as separate solutions, they are not separate on Blackburn's account. He explicitly links stability to the emotional and practical staircase; one might have a stable attitude and thus react with strong emotion, decisive practical considerations or both. Since Blackburn considers that having a value towards  $x$  just is to have a stable attitude towards  $x$  it is clear that on his view stability cannot be left out of the solution to the open question argument objection. When we consider Blackburn's potential reply to the problem, we need to, as I did above, unpack what is meant by stability, then we need to consider stability and the staircase as a package.

Let us look at (15) and (16) in the argument once more:

"(15) There is a conceptual link between judging that Jones has judged that  $x$  is good (bad) and expecting Jones to be disposed, *ceteris paribus*, to demand that you share his non-cognitive sentiments towards  $x$ .

(16) Competent and reflective speakers of English are convinced that they are able to imagine clear-headed (and otherwise psychologically healthy beings) who judge that Jones expresses the sentiment ( $H!_M(x)$ ), but who fail to expect Jones to be

disposed, *ceteris paribus*, to demand that they share this non-cognitive sentiment towards x” (Miller, 2003, p. 90).

We must imagine Jones’ judgement about x as being both stable and close to the top of the staircase. He takes his stance towards x to be stable, and so is resistant to adopting a different stance. He also thinks anyone who denies x is wrong, and thus, warrants hostility or some kind of practical restraint, or both. And let us, for the sake of imagining what Jones is expressing better, think that “x is good” means “saving starving children is good”.

Note, however, the second twist in the Miller’s adapted internalism; this is not an expectation about Jones himself. (15) does not suggest that if Jones holds a stable view high on the staircase that “saving children is good”, then we should expect him to also be disposed that you demand to share his sentiment that “saving children is good”.

Instead, (15) is explicitly about our judgement about Jones; it is about what we would expect. And so, when we turn to (16) we find that we must consider competent and reflective speakers who are then able to imagine clear-headed beings who judge Jones expressing a sentiment, but not demanding others share it. Using the emotional staircase alone, we might have trouble explaining (16); not all moral judgements include strong enough reactions practical or emotional to generate and so to merit a demand. Combined with stability, however, which and you recall prompts the practical or emotional reaction. The expressivist can argue that when an attitude is stable, there is a conceptual link between Jones holding an attitude and demanding others hold it too.

If we accept that stability includes both resistance to revising an attitude and that what

creates this resistance is a confidence that the attitude is the right one to have<sup>20</sup>. Then it follows that, when this notion is challenged, Jones will defend his judgement and where it is appropriate, try to convince Smith who disagrees with him, that he is right. What the expressivist needs to explain now is what it is to demand someone else share your attitude.

The crucial part of Miller's objection, which obfuscates how the expressivist might respond, asks observers to reflect on Jones in isolation. Clear-headed beings may be thinking reflectively about Jones having a sentiment, but the surprise that he might not start insisting others agree with him only seems far-fetched if we imagine moral discourse as a solitary activity. Of course, moral discourse is anything but, and if the expressivist is right, it is an activity born out of our need to coordinate with our fellow human beings (cf. Gibbard, 1990; Blackburn, 1998).

Stable attitudes, recall, are resistant to change. One tries to hold onto one's stable moral attitudes. We can imagine Jones considering his attitudes in isolation; perhaps some new information has come to light about x and this has caused him to re-examine his attitude towards x. But this isolated case is not the same as the case with reflective judges, precisely because it would not make sense that Jones would demand anything of anyone if he was reflecting on his own thoughts.

However, should Jones imagine himself in an argument, or should he be in one, the stability of his attitude will come into play. If Jones has a stable attitude about x and it is challenged, then he will defend it. And we can imagine perfectly well a defence in which Jones claims he is right for x, y, z reasons and tries to convince his interlocutor of this. A

<sup>20</sup> Confidence that you are right to hold an attitude is, I think, crucial to the notion of stability. In this section I don't argue for it, but I do later in this chapter.

stable attitude, given what stability is, has defence of the attitude built into it. When challenged, the built in defence generates a demand for the interlocutor to accept the same sentiment. If Jones did not think the interlocutor should also accept his sentiment, then it would be strange for him to defend it at all. The confidence that underlies a stable judgement tells us this much.

One might suggest that having a stable attitude does not entail the desire to defend said attitude but this strikes me as false. If your stable attitude (z) is one which you are very reluctant to revise, then if it is challenged by some different attitude (b), you will seek to defend (z) by arguing that (z) is the correct attitude to hold. In other words, I take it that the stability of an attitude entails defence of it when it is challenged. If this were not the case, if one did not defend a stable attitude when challenged, then one might question whether they held a stable attitude in the first place. That is not to say that attitudes cannot change over time, Blackburn admits that this is perfectly legitimate (1998, p. 67).

Rather, change in a stable attitude would not come lightly.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, if any attitude, which was supposedly stable, is not defended against, we may question whether it's stable. Of course, one may doubt a stable judgement<sup>22</sup>, and as I have mentioned one may also reconsider an attitude, but this is beside the point. The point is that stability includes the notion of resistance, and this is enough to ground the defence claim.

One may object that even if resistance to change an attitude entails defence of that attitude, that defence of an attitude is not the same as demanding others to hold the same

<sup>21</sup> Change within stable attitudes and how much is permitted is discussed in the Fundamental Error Chapter. As such, I will not look at this discussion here because it is not integral to the argument.

<sup>22</sup> Again, I deal with the notion of doubting a stable judgement in the Fundamental Error Chapter.

attitude. If this is the case, then the sketch of stable attitudes above does not help us respond to Miller's open question argument.

Fortunately, the objection does not succeed.. Although, we can see that resistance to change attitude (z) is not equivalent to demanding that you also share attitude (z). Once again, if we look at the scenarios in which resistance to change will occur, it will be when a stable judgement is challenged in some way either by another view, or by additional descriptive evidence. Assuming new evidence that would inform our reflection on our attitude would not change it. We will assume our attitude is right. If we think our attitude is right. We will defend it. And the combination of taking an attitude to be both right and something to defend, includes the notion of instruction when it is challenged.

If my argument above is correct, then the quasi-realist can respond to Miller's request seen in (18 - 20) below. The quasi-realist can argue that the speakers in (16) have based their conviction about Jones on a misunderstanding of stable attitudes.

(18) Unless there is some other explanation of the conviction described in (16), we are entitled to conclude that there is no conceptual link between judging that Jones has expressed  $H!_M(x)$  and expecting Jones to demand that you share this non-cognitive sentiment towards x.

(19) Unless there is some other explanation of the conviction described in (16), we are entitled to conclude that the judgement that x is good is not identical to the judgement that Jones has expressed  $H!_M(x)$ .

(20) Unless there is some other explanation of the conviction described in (16), we are entitled to conclude the judging that x is good cannot be analysed in terms of the expression of  $H!_M(x)$  (Miller, 2003, p 90 – 91)

This does not yet solve the moral attitude problem, however. We may be able to resist the claim that Jones would not demand others share his attitude about x, but the explanation above needs to be developed before we can mark the difference between a moral attitude and an aesthetic attitude.

Miller claims that the circularity problem we saw earlier, rears its head once more. He writes “the definition would be satisfied even if I approved of x and approved of my aesthetic approval of x remaining stable. What I approve of being stable is the moral sentiment *itself*. So the definition would have to come out rather as:

$$H!_M(x) = \text{df } (H!_M(x) \text{ and } H!(\text{stability of } [H!_M(x)]))” \text{ (2003, p. 91)}$$

On the left we find “the moral attitude”, on the right, the explanation for what it is. But, as Miller points out, the representation looks circular. In order to explain what the moral attitude is, the quasi-realist must cite having a moral attitude. In other words, on the above the very thing we are trying to explain is used in the explanation. But, Miller claims, the expressivist needs to make this move, because if she doesn’t then a representation like the below is open to being either an aesthetic or a moral attitude:



“ $H!_M(\text{honesty}) = \text{df } (H!(x) \ \& \ H!(\text{stability of } [H!_M(x)]))$ ” (2003, p. 90)

Stability, Miller claims, doesn't seem to help the quasi-realist: whichever option the quasi-realist chooses, she falls foul of the moral attitude problem. In the next section I'll argue that the quasi-realist can respond to Miller. She can do this by adopting an Ideal Quasi-Realism. I'll explain my theory first, then show how it solves the problem.

### **The Moral Attitude Problem: An Ideal Solution**

The problem has shifted somewhat since we first introduced it. If my reading of Blackburn is right, then it looks like we can avoid the threat of the open question argument. But now the problem, the main problem, remains. It looks like Blackburn still has to explain the difference between an aesthetic and a moral attitude. The expressivist manoeuvre won't help us here, either. Since the problem remains even if we look at it from the lens of the expressivist. If we ask what we are doing when we express an aesthetic attitude and a moral one we will, as we saw above, find some striking similarities. As we saw in the introduction, the ideal quasi-realist claims that when we express a moral judgement we express approval of the match in judgements between ourselves and an ideal version of ourselves. How does this help? Recall that Ideal You has features of her reasoning which are understood to be sound: she is impartial, she lacks bias, she has full information about the situation she is judging. It is the impartiality of Ideal You that makes the difference between the aesthetic and moral judgements. Even if we go so far as to say they are both

normative (remember the aesthetic critic). Let us look at an example to see how this works:

Judgement 1: Murder is wrong.

Judgement 2: Matisse's 'The Snail' is bad.

In both judgements we seem to be expressing disapproval towards something. When you voice "murder is wrong" you express an agreement or match in attitudes between you and your advisor. Some of the features of an Ideal version of yourself like full information seem to transfer well to the aesthetic case. For example, Ideal You being aware of the art history preceding Matisse, and indeed the development his work (and why he needed to radically change the way he made art near the end of his life) fit well. We can see, given this, why on the aesthetic case one might also approve of whatever Ideal You thought about art. However, other features of the Ideal reasoning do not seem to fit. Impartiality, for example, seems misplaced. We don't seem to need it for the aesthetic case, after all, what good would it do? To answer this, imagine the following:

On the moral case Ideal you is impartial and has full access to the information of the situation – whatever it may be – that we are judging. You, imagine, initially feel approval for x. Let us suppose x is "abortion". Perhaps your moral sensibility without anything ideal is that suffering is bad, not having an abortion can lead to suffering, so abortion should be (generally) permitted. Supposing the argument you think the argument sound, then you'll approve of abortion as long as your sensibility, at a basic level, ties a reduction in suffering to approval. Ideal You will be aware of the sensibilities Regular You already has. And she may also feel approval for abortion, but the input that generates the approval for Ideal

You will be broader. This is because Ideal You is impartial and her reasoning is made from behind a veil of ignorance (Rawls, 2005).

Ideal you views the situation in terms of the persons effected, and coupled with her specific knowledge of the situation, and background theories about pain, suffering, and human wants and needs, she approves of abortion. Ideal You, then, is part of a reflective equilibrium. It is this that makes her ideal, and it is this that gives her normative force.

What about the aesthetic case? One might suggest that we can do the same thing for the aesthetic case and that if we can do this, then we are back to square one: the expressivist will be seen to express the same thing for stable moral judgements and for aesthetic ones. Suppose you express disapproval for 'The Snail'. You do this because you think it is something a child could make. Suppose Ideal you had full information of art history, and when you reflect on your judgement you remember an old art history lesson from university when you were taught about Matisse. Suppose also that you approve of Ideal You and so give more credence to her attitude than your own. Suppose you change your mind in light of this and you now think 'The Snail' is not bad. You may even express approval of the match between Regular You and Ideal you. This match would be what makes your attitude about Matisse's painting stable. But where does impartiality come in? You might try to apply it, but it seems misplaced to do so. You are the only person involved.

It is impartiality, and the notion that the Ideal version of you is behind a veil of ignorance and engaging in a reflective equilibrium that marks the difference. I have, of course, made this problem as tricky for myself as possible. An easier move would be to suggest that aesthetic judgements, even if they express attitudes, reduce to those attitudes. Such that, on

the aesthetic case we really are talking about ourselves. Or we could suggest that aesthetic judgements non-cognitive at all and attempt to give them an alternative treatment. But by giving an example which is tough, I hope to both directly answer Miller's problem with quasi-realism, and to motivate why the quasi-realist needs to be ideal in the particular way I sketch.

Finally, then, what is the solution. Just what is the difference in expression between your aesthetic approval and your moral approval (even if we imagine them both to be stable). It is this:

Matisse's 'The Snail' is good = approval a match between Regular You approving of 'The Snail' and Ideal You approving of 'The Snail'.

Abortion is good = approval of a match between Regular You approving of 'The Snail' and Impartial Ideal You approving of abortion.

It's how we understand the Ideal version of you and what she must have in terms of her reasoning power which makes the difference. Now, one problem with this is that it looks like a stable scientific judgement, if given an expressivist treatment, would be no different from a moral one. Leaving aside how feasible an expressivist treatment of scientific discourse would be, our objector is honing in on an important point. If impartiality makes the difference on the aesthetic/moral distinction, it can't be shared by another kind of discourse. Indeed not. And it does not. Science's impartiality is Archimedean. It stands back from the world and pokes, prods, and records it. My Ideal Quasi-Realist is not Archimedean in this sense. She does not sit apart from the world. She is, if you'll forgive the phrase "Anthropologically Impartial". Her impartiality is directed towards human

beings, as are her background theories in her reflective equilibrium which are composed of some rudimentary physical, biological, evolutionary, and psychological theories. So it doesn't seem like the comparison between science and ideal quasi-realism can be made.

One might raise the following problem. If aesthetic stable judgements express a match with the attitude of an ideal version of you, and if the difference between Ideal Versions of You is impartiality, then what about moral judgements about ourselves. A moral judgement about oneself seems much like an aesthetic judgement about Matisse's painting. How, one might ask, is the moral case any different?

To mark the difference we can call upon a perhaps unlikely source: John Stuart Mill. In *On Liberty* (Mill and Gray, 2008). Mill discusses the limits of state interference with an individual's freedom. He argues that when considering how far we can interfere (in anyone of sound mind) is determined by whether the person would harm others. Harm, for Mill, is tied to his theory of utilitarian rights. In which the foundation for rights are based on utilitarian principles. For example, we get more utility from having a law against murder than not, thus, limiting my freedom so that I cannot wilfully murder, is a legitimate constraint on my freedom.

The following claim is important to our discussion: the threat of harm permits curtailing someone's freedom if the threat of harm applies to others, but not ourselves. It is this idea that I would like to apply to our view of the aesthetic and moral distinction. I apply Mill's thought with the following claim: a necessary condition for your attitude to be moral is that your attitude must, if it were applied to the world, affect others. By 'applied to the world' I mean an action which would impact others as a result of your attitude. When the impartial version of you considers an attitude, this is a claim she has in mind.

We have one final hurdle to jump. David Merli (Merli, 2007b) advances a version of the moral attitude argument which puts two constraints on the quasi-realist's solution. The first is that the solution must not be too narrow, but nor must it be too broad. Merli claims that a solution that was too narrow would "tie moral judgement too closely to some inessential feature of moralizing. Thus excluding conceptually competent, though unusual, speakers" (2007, p. 29). In contrast, a solution which was too broad would "collapse the distinctions between different sorts of normative judgement and we will see disagreement where there are consistent, if practically incompatible, assessments" (Merli, 2007, p. 29). The second constraint, which I've explained above would apply to Blackburn's account if no answer to the problem were forthcoming.

The ideal quasi-realist can accommodate the first constraint due to her inclusion of impartiality as a primary condition of how Ideal You exercises her reflective equilibrium. Now, the particularist<sup>23</sup> will have a bone to pick with my use of impartiality. He will claim that moral judgement does not have to be tied to impartiality at all. But this claim forgets that the core of impartiality for the ideal quasi-realist is anthropocentric; it is concerned with human beings as they are. It is not a generalist principle for guiding action, it is a form of reflection.

That is, the impartial advisor does not guide action in the same way a first order theory does. She simply acknowledges that when it comes to metaethical critical reflection, impartiality may be our best defence against the distinction between self-interest and

<sup>23</sup> See (Blum, 1991)

selfishness which Blum (Blum, 1991) is eager to protect. Ideal quasi-realism by incorporating an impartial ideal version of themselves who is paired with their actual attitudes to see if they match or not can potentially give the particularist a way to explain why their judgement that  $x$  is good in circumstances  $C$  is a stable one. It's stable because they approve of the match between their judgement that  $x$  in  $C$  and the impartial ideal version of themselves also approves of  $x$  in  $C$ . The impartiality does not prescribe moral weight, as a first order story does. What it does is apply background theories about human beings to a situation. This, then, can seemingly work for the generalist or the particularist.

On the second constraint the idea quasi-realist has given her answer above. If she is right, then the difference between expressing a moral judgement and an aesthetic judgment is determined by 1. Whether the ideal advisor is anthropologically impartial or not 2. Your approval of the match between the impartial advisor's attitude and your own. If my answer to both constraints above is on the right track, then we can satisfy Merli's conditions for success.

## **Conclusion**

I've argued that the ideal quasi-realist can solve the moral attitude problem in both its forms: Miller's version, and Merli's version. In addition, I've argued that Blackburn's quasi-realism can overcome Miller's open question argument objection, but that even with this answer in place, he cannot solve the moral attitude problem. In addition, Blackburn's account would suffer, according to Merli, from being too broad. Whereas, as I've argued, the ideal quasi-realist can successfully overcome both constraints.

## Chapter 2. Quasi-Realism, Disagreement, and Fundamental Error

### Introduction

The heart of the quasi-realist programme is how it makes sense of its commitment to making sense of realist sounding moral discourse. The quasi-realist aims to explain ordinary moral realist sounding discourse without relying on what she thinks are faulty realist tools of the trade to achieve her aim. To satisfy her commitment to echoing realist sounding discourse, the quasi-realist uses an anti-realist account of moral judgement. There are, then, two important parts of the quasi-realist project. 1. The aim of quasi-realism to echo the realist and 2. The unique flavour of anti-realism the quasi-realist employs to satisfy her aims. For the purposes of this chapter I'll focus on Egan's fundamental error objection and Köhler's reapplication of it to Simon Blackburn's quasi-realist expressivism. It is vital for the success of the quasi-realist project that an explanation of moral error is given; without such an explanation the quasi-realist would not be able to satisfy her commitment to echoing realist sounding moral discourse.

I argue that the tools already present in Blackburn's quasi-realist account can be used to solve the fundamental error problem. What the quasi-realist needs for those tools to work, however, is to reject the recipe for stability offered to her by Egan and Köhler. If we reject strong stability we can find a solution to the fundamental error problem which draws on the account already given by Blackburn. The motivation for my approach is that, if successful, the quasi-realist will:

1. Reap the benefits of solving the fundamental error problem; the quasi-realist fulfils her commitment to echo our realist sounding moral discourse.



2. Not be required to add anything extra to her account to fulfil her commitment to echo realist sounding ordinary moral discourse, thus avoiding any ad hoc charges.

I consider two different readings of Blackburn's view on quasi-realist stability. I will provide evidence for both readings in section 5 and show why ultimately we should regard Blackburn as having an antecedent stability view. We shall see that understanding Blackburn's antecedent stability view in detail can help us form a successful reply to both Egan and Köhler. Both readings, however, generate their own unique problems. If the strong reading is correct, then it generates Egan's original fundamental error problem, and Köhler's reapplication of it.

Blackburn's reply does not stymie the problem either. Should the antecedent view be the correct reading, then there is a puzzle over how we should understand knowledge claims. At first glance it seems that by accepting an antecedent account of stability the quasi-realist is unable to make sense of knowledge claims. I will explain how Blackburn can still make satisfactory knowledge claims using what I've called his narrow antecedent view. However, narrow antecedent stability is not enough to solve the fundamental error problem. Even with an antecedent view of stability in place, the threat of SMUGNESS<sup>24</sup>

For Blackburn stable judgements not only admit of the remote possibility of an improvement, but also, vitally, include the notion of admiration. I will discuss how admiration and knowledge are tied together on Blackburn's account before discussing a problem with his reply: Blackburn's reply to Egan removes admiration, and so the crucial difference between a change and an improvement is lost. There is no need, I will argue, to remove admiration from the quasi-realist story to avoid SMUGNESS. Instead, the quasi-realist should continue to adopt Blackburn's narrow stability for knowledge claims and adopt what I call Blackburn's wide antecedent stability

<sup>24</sup> SMUGNESS is the view that although your judgements can be in error mine are immune.

for claims about doubt. By splitting stability into two the quasi-realist can successfully answer the fundamental error problem.

It is doubt, and not error, which is the real focus of the fundamental error problem (despite its name). The upshot of my approach is that we no longer need to focus on the distinction between being mistaken and stability in the way Egan has it where being mistaken is the antecedent view, and stability is the strong view. This might seem like a problem for the quasi-realist, surely she must – due to her aim of echoing realist sounding moral discourse - wish to have a clear distinction between being mistaken and having a stable judgement. But this objection, I will argue, is based on a misunderstanding of what is at stake in the original problem. What is at stake is whether the quasi-realist can explain what it is to doubt a stable judgement. What is at stake, then, is not a quasi-realist explanation of error.

Egan (2007) claims that the quasi-realist fails in his commitments by failing to fully make sense of fundamental moral error. This failure, Egan claims, lies in his expressivism. The target Egan has in mind is the first, and most important, piece of the quasi-realist puzzle; her account of attitudes and how they make sense of improvement. Her account of attitudes, Egan claims, is unable to accommodate fundamental error. Thus the quasi-realist fails in her aim to echo realist sounding moral discourse. Blackburn uses the analogy of Neurath's boat to illustrate how the quasi-realist can make sense of improvement on his account of attitudes. Blackburn writes, "the right analogy is with the rebuilding of Neurath's boat, and we know that in principle the result of that might be an improved boat" (1993, p. 97). For Blackburn, we detect defects in our set of attitudes in light of our other attitudes (1998, p. 313). We are engaged in a process of improvement aiming at the goal of the "best set of attitudes" without settling upon them. Getting this story of improvement right and making sense of our fallibility, as we'll see, is important for the success of the quasi-realist programme. This is the first piece of the quasi-

realist puzzle: he can explain what is going on when we make moral judgements and improvement of his moral judgements via his account of attitudes.

Egan claims that the quasi-realist can make sense of two types of error (past error and future error) because they can both be explained via his account of attitudes in terms of approval or disapproval of your actions, or approval or disapproval of my past or future actions (2007, p. 209). The problem arises, Egan claims, when the quasi-realist tries to make sense of first-person present error via his account of attitudes. The quasi-realist can't use the same tools he has been making use of for other types of error to make sense of present first person error (2007, p. 209). Egan claims that someone has a case of first person present error if she has both a stable attitude of disapproval towards stealing and a concern that she might be wrong about her stable attitude of disapproval towards stealing (2007, p. 209).

Egan grants that the quasi-realist can make sense of someone else's moral error, and first person past moral error. But she is incapable, Egan claims, of making sense of the possibility that her own present moral judgements might be in error. If Egan's fundamental error problem is an insoluble problem for the quasi-realist, then quasi-realists will not be able to make sense of a vital part of our moral discourse.

If Egan's argument goes through and the quasi-realist can't make sense of first person present error then he can't deploy all his attitudes equally; some of his attitudes will be above reproach. If this is the case then the notion that our attitudes can regulate our other attitudes collapses, and with it a key piece of the quasi-realist's account of how anti-realist tools of the trade can make sense of our realist sounding ordinary moral talk. Let us, then, look at Egan's argument in more detail.

## Egan's Argument

The quasi-realist must, according to Egan, accommodate three types of error:

1. Third person error: another person "holding a false moral view".
2. First person error not in the present: a false moral view held in the past, or a false moral view which I will hold in the future.
3. First-person present error: "I presently hold some false moral view" (Egan 2007, p. 208)

For the quasi-realist's account of fundamental error to be a success he must, according to Egan, abide by certain constraints:

NO SMUGNESS: "there isn't any sort of moral error to which others are subject but which I have an a priori guarantee of immunity" (2007, p. 210).

Failing to avoid SMUGNESS would reveal an asymmetry between my moral judgements and yours (2009, p. 204). And an asymmetry of this kind doesn't match up with what we think is going on when we take part in ordinary moral discourse. Ordinarily we don't assume that we have a guarantee from error that others don't possess, or at least, we don't assume we have an a priori guarantee. Our ability to engage in moral debate and to disagree with one another would be horribly confused if we accepted an asymmetry of this kind as part of our moral discourse. And we don't typically act as if we do have an a priori immunity of the kind Egan is describing.

Accepting NO SMUGNESS follows from the quasi-realist commitment to echo ordinary realist sounding discourse (if we assume that ordinary discourse does not privilege the first person over the third). Blackburn writes that if smugness were part of the quasi-realist account “then there is this big, bad, bug underlying the whole story: an a priori self-confidence and corresponding asymmetry in my attitude to myself and others” (2009, p. 203).

FUNDAMENTAL FALLIBILITY: “it’s possible for people’s stable moral beliefs to be mistaken” (2007, p. 213)

Quasi-realists must accept FUNDAMENTAL FALLIBILITY for the same reason that they must accept no smugness: because the quasi-realist wants to give a symmetrical account of error in moral judgement. I must accept that I can be fundamentally wrong too i.e. my stable judgements (as opposed to my unstable judgements which I imagine could benefit from processes of improvement) can be mistaken. On the quasi-realist account, then, being in fundamental error looks something like this:

FUNDAMENTAL ERROR = a) stable belief b) mistaken

The problem is that this picture of fundamental error puts the quasi-realist in dire straits. Egan writes, “for my moral belief that P to be stable is for it to be such that it would survive any improving change” (2007, p. 214). But for P to be mistaken some improving change would lead me to no longer hold that P (Egan 2007, p. 214). And so, if I were to be in fundamental error, “my belief that P would have to be a) stable and b) not stable, which I can’t have” (Egan 2007, p. 214). According to Egan when the quasi-realist does explain what’s going on when I express my concern that my stable moral belief x might be wrong, I am expressing some sort of disapproval

towards x, coupled with uncertainty about whether any process of improvement would lead to my abandoning my current stable attitude toward x (2007, p. 211).

If this is what's going on when I express doubt about a stable belief, however, then things become tricky for the quasi-realist in the case of fundamental disagreement. Suppose we both have stable beliefs regarding P (you endorse P and I endorse  $\sim$ P) we end up, according to Egan, with fundamental error. One of us must be wrong about P and yet we both have stable beliefs which can't be improved. And so, Egan claims quasi-realists like Blackburn are in trouble because it seems like he can only say his moral belief is "mistaken if it is not stable" (2007, p. 213).

This, Egan argues, results in the quasi-realist being committed to:

FIRST PERSON IMMUNITY: "the guarantee that none of my beliefs are fundamentally mistaken- that is stable but incorrect" (2007, p. 214).

An a priori guarantee that none of my beliefs are fundamentally mistaken is an unacceptable conclusion for the quasi-realist given that fundamental error is taken to be a part of our ordinary moral discourse. Equally the quasi-realist doesn't want to give up the NO SMUGNESS constraint, nor the FALLIBILITY constraint since both are also part of our ordinary moral discourse and rejecting them would be to reject the quasi-realist commitment to echo our realist sounding ordinary moral discourse (2007, p. 214). So the quasi-realist needs to explain how he can make sense of cases of fundamental error on his account without recourse to his previous explanations which lead to FIRST PERSON IMMUNITY.

## Blackburn's Response to Egan

Blackburn argues that Egan has made an error in his formulation of what the quasi-realist takes to be an account of our stable attitudes (2009, p. 205). Blackburn's strategy is to concentrate on Egan's claim about what quasi-realist stability is. He argues that when Egan writes "for my moral belief that P to be mistaken is for there to be some improving change (or course of improving changes) that would lead me to abandon P" he is conflating two crucially different claims, claim (M) and claim (I) (2007, p. 214).

Claim (M): if something is entrenched in my outlook in such a way that nothing I could recognise as an improvement would undermine it, then it is true (Blackburn 2009, p. 205).

Claim (I): If something is entrenched in my outlook, in such a way that nothing that is an improvement would undermine it, then it is true (Blackburn 2009, p. 206).

The important difference between claim (M) and claim (I) is that in claim (M) the improvement is nothing "I could recognise" and in claim (I) it is "nothing that is an improvement".

Blackburn's claim is that once you use the correct formulation the rest of Egan's argument doesn't follow (2009, p. 205). He argues that claim (M) leads to SMUGNESS because claim (M) states that improvements must be improvements by my own lights; they are only improvements if I think they are improvements. But if the quasi-realist uses something like claim (I) in which the improvement is only something which *is* an improvement then this removes the SMUGNESS threat.

(I) can be adapted so that the quasi-realist can say the following:

(I’): “If something is entrenched in anyone’s outlook, in such a way that nothing that is an improvement would undermine it, then it is true” (2009, p. 206).

On (I’) there is no asymmetry, and it is asymmetry between my stable judgements and yours which Egan needs for his argument to go through (2009, p. 205). Blackburn claims that it is the conflation in Egan’s improvement claim that is doing all the work in his argument. And without it the argument collapses. There are, however, problems with this reply. We will consider them in the section below.

## **Knowledge, Improvement, and Change**

In this section we’ll look at how the quasi-realist gives admiration a central role in knowledge claims. We will also look at Blackburn’s reply to Egan. I will show that the removal of “I would recognise” from the quasi-realist account removes admiration too, and admiration is crucial to explaining the difference between an improvement and a change. This distinction is, in turn, crucial to knowledge claims which deploy the notion of improvement. The quasi-realist might say that when she makes a claim to moral knowledge, what she is expressing is a stable judgement of some kind.<sup>25</sup> In “Truth, Realism, and the Regulation of Theory” Blackburn writes that the emotivist (and I am assuming this applies to the quasi-realist expressivist as well) has access to levels of sympathy and imagination; one can put oneself in another’s shoes (1993, p. 20). Blackburn writes:

<sup>25</sup> We will see evidence for this in section six.



“Suppose that one recognises that these capacities vary from person to person and time to time. Suppose finally that one admires those in whom they are boldly and finely developed. All these thoughts and attitudes are perfectly accessible to the emotivist. But they seem to give him all that is needed for a concept of an improvement or a deterioration in his own moral stance. He can go beyond saying ‘I might change’ to ‘I might improve’” (1993, p. 20).

Blackburn claims that the emotivist can make this shift from “change” to “improvement” by caching out improvement in terms of admiration. The emotivist will consider a change as something she would admire, and this admiration comes from her own set of sensibilities (1993, p. 20). For the quasi-realist, my “knowing that X is good is knowing to choose X/admire X” (1998, p. 70). For the quasi-realist understanding her own fallibility consists in having an understanding of what it is for others to be wrong; and by understanding that others can have particular defects, I also maintain that I can suffer from them too (1993, p. 79). Given this understanding, I can entertain the possibility that I might be wrong and therefore make sense of my own fallibility (1993, p. 79).

With the above in mind let’s look again at what Blackburn writes in reply to Egan:

“[...] as we have seen, officially stability is a matter of surviving anything that the subject would regard as an improving change, either antecedently, or post hoc [...]

(M) If something is entrenched in my outlook, in such a way that nothing I could recognize as an improvement would undermine it, then it is true.

(I) If something is entrenched in my outlook, in such a way that nothing that is an improvement would undermine it, then it is true” (2009, p. 205-206).

Blackburn claims that once stability is understood in terms of what is an improvement, and not as something only I would recognise as an improvement, Egan’s SMUGNESS charge fails to go through. Blackburn claims that if we remove this clause then the quasi-realist is no longer immune to error. And so the reason one may doubt a stable judgement on this view of stability is because there is a gap between actual improvement and what I would regard as an improvement (2009, p. 206). This is enough, Blackburn claims, to escape the charge.

The reply, however, is not successful. It removes something crucial for the quasi-realist: the difference between an improvement and a change. If we remove what “I would regard” as an improvement from stability it is no longer clear why a change in my sensibility can be considered as an improvement rather than a mere change. For something to be an improvement it must, at least to some extent, be something I regard as such because an improvement in my set of attitudes is an improvement only in virtue of the attitudes I hold. For the quasi-realist, I judge my attitudes in light of my other attitudes.<sup>26</sup>

If an improvement can only be judged as such in light of my attitudes, and to engage with the judgement of my attitudes I must invoke processes of improvement which I admire, then, contra Blackburn (I) and (M) can be read in the same way and this is not a conflation at all.

Improvement on the quasi-realist picture includes within its definition that I recognise it as such. Blackburn writes;

<sup>26</sup> This was mentioned briefly in terms of the Neurath’s boat analogy in the introduction.

“[...] people are capable of habits of projection which from my own standpoint are deplorable: they judge things of which they are ignorant, and their views are the function of fears and fantasies, blind traditions, prejudice, and so on. But then who am I to be sure that I am free of these defects? This thought is quite sufficient to *enable me to understand the possibility of my attitudes improving. They ought to be formed from qualities I admire* – the proper use of knowledge, real capacity of sympathy [...]. If they are not, and if the use of those capacities and the avoidance of the inferior determinants of opinion would lead me to change, then the resulting attitudes would not only be different, but better” (1993, p. 79). [My italics]

In the above quotation we see that admiration of particular processes, like sympathy and applying that process to my attitudes, allows me to say that the new attitudes I may have after I have assessed my sensibility with sympathy are not only a change from my old attitudes, but an improvement. Admiration, then, is key to understanding improvement, and it must be thought about in terms of what “I admire”. After all, it paints an odd picture to say something is admirable but to not sincerely mean it. Either I am lying, or I do not understand what it means to say “x is admirable”.<sup>27</sup> Claims (M) and (I), then, read the same because improvement includes within it my “recognition” of something as an improvement. Even if the above objection fails, however, there is another problem for Blackburn’s reply: Köhler reapplication of the fundamental error problem. We will turn our attention to the reapplication next.

<sup>27</sup> This claim requires further argument. One might claim that there are admirable things which don’t require my recognising them to be such. However, I think given the quotation we can plausibly say that Blackburn is discussing processes of improvement which “I admire” and given this, the revised version of the objection: that if I admire x I don’t have to view it as admirable seems implausible.

## Köhler's Re-application of the Problem

Sebastian Köhler (2015) argues that Blackburn's solution still suffers from the problem of fundamental error because although his solution addresses the problem when it's applied to what error is, it doesn't solve the problem if it's re-applied to our judgements about what it is to be in moral error. Köhler writes:

The problem with Egan's argument, so Blackburn argues, is that this is not how his proposal should be understood. On Egan's reading, 'improvement' is a descriptive notion, which turns error-attributions into representational states. However, 'improvement' is supposed to be a normative notion, in the sense that it requires the same treatment as moral judgments. An expressivist should, consequently, hold that error-attributions are non-representational states. On this account, what an improvement *is* is a normative question to which 'what the relevant thinker would regard as an improvement' constitutes just one (implausible) answer (2015, p. 162).

The key move that Köhler makes is to reintroduce the problem at the level of the mental state. He reapplies Egan's original problem in terms of the mental state I have when I judge a stable judgement to be fundamentally in error. Köhler wants to know what the quasi-realist state of mind consists in when she judges someone to be in fundamental error (2015, p. 163). He offers one way the quasi-realist can give an expressivist explanation of fundamental error; she can do this, he suggests by thinking about improvement within a moral sensibility. A moral sensibility is made up of various dispositions in which the mental states generate a moral judgement (2015, p. 163). In this case, then, the mental states which make up the moral sensibility create the moral

judgement (M). Köhler claims that the account he gives demonstrates that the quasi-realist is still in trouble: Egan's charge re-emerges on the level of the mental state and thus the quasi-realist is committed to FIRST PERSON IMMUNITY (2015, p. 162). Let us look at Köhler's argument in more detail.

For Köhler, when you judge one moral sensibility to be an improvement over another you think that that moral sensibility is better (2015, p. 163). With this view of moral sensibility in mind Köhler cashes out what assigning fundamental error to my moral judgement (M) would look like in the following way:

- (i) The better sensibility is the one with a certain feature or features F which other sensibilities lack (2015, p. 163). In this case I judge that any sensibility  $S_x$  is better should it have a particular feature (or features), and due to having this particular feature (or features) it is better than any sensibility  $S_y$  (2015, p. 163).
- (ii) A's sensibility lacks the feature F which is part of an improved sensibility. I judge that if A changed their sensibility to include the new feature that M would be abandoned (2015, p. 163).

Next, Köhler adapts both (i) and (ii) into expressivist terms. He tries to make sense of what it would mean to think that another sensibility is better due to certain features. Köhler claims that on his account of moral sensibility what it is to form the judgement that any sensibility  $x$  is better than sensibility  $y$  is to approve of preferring any  $x$  over any  $y$  if  $x$  has particular features (2015, p. 163).

With the above in mind Köhler then creates a quasi-realist version of (i) which he calls (i\*):

(i\*) Approval of preferring any sensibility  $S_x$  over any other sensibility  $S_y$ , if one comes to judge that  $S_x$  has certain features  $F_1, F_2, \dots$ , or  $F_n$ , which  $S_y$  lacks.

Köhler couples (i\*) with (ii): if the absent feature that is part of someone's sensibility is discovered, then that would lead to the abandonment of my moral judgement  $M$ . This explanation works, Köhler claims, when it is applied to another person. It fails when it is applied to an account of first person present error. It cannot, he claims, make sense of fundamental error.

Let us see how Köhler applies his moral sensibility account of improvement to the case of first person moral error (fundamental error). First, Köhler clarifies the mental states of a having a stable judgement:

Stable Judgement: "the judgment that there is no sensibility  $S_x$  which is such that one would approve of preferring  $S_x$  to one's current sensibility and which would lead one to abandon  $M$ " (2015, p. 165).

Köhler then makes use of (i) and (ii) again to give an account of the mental states working behind the scenes when I attribute error to a judgement.

Error Attribution: In (i) I approve of preferring a sensibility due to it having certain features which my current sensibility lacks. And in (ii) I judge that there's a possibility that there is a feature which my sensibility lacks and if I tried to include the additional feature I would reject ( $M$ ) (2015, p. 165).

Köhler claims that the above account of the mental states at play when something is stable and mistaken in the case of first person present error is inconsistent (2015, p. 165). He claims that my judgement that (T) is stable is a judgement in which I think there is no possible feature F which would lead to my abandonment of (T). And my judgement that (T) is mistaken is based on there being a possible feature F which would lead to my abandonment of (T).

This puts the quasi-realist in an untenable position in which his account of fundamental error entails that he is both judging that judgement (T) is stable and that there are no improving features that would lead to his abandoning (T) and that judgement (T) may not be stable because there could be possible features which would lead to me abandoning (T). This situation is not something the quasi-realist can make sense of because “the second judgment concedes a possibility the first rules out” (2015, p. 165). And if he cannot make sense of these judgements then FIRST PERSON IMMUNITY reappears (2015, p. 165).

## **Two Readings of Quasi-Realist Stability: Strong Stability**

Next I will give two readings of Blackburn’s account of stability. On the first reading Blackburn accepts strong stability. It is the strong view, I shall argue, which both Egan (2009) and Köhler (2015) mistakenly read Blackburn as holding. Without such a strong reading of stability the tension required for the problem falters. Strong stability admits of no possible future improvement. Egan claims that quasi-realist stability is where “for my moral belief that P to be stable is for it to be such that it would survive any improving change” (2007, p. 214). Köhler writes that stability is where there are no improving features (2015, p. 165). It is strong stability, as we have seen, which generates the fundamental error problem. Egan requires stability to be strong in order to show that the quasi-realist is inconsistent. She cannot, Egan argues, explain fundamental error, because in virtue of what it is for a judgement to be stable, it can never be

wrong. Thus we both get both the SMUGNESS verdict, and we find the quasi-realist unable to explain a vital piece of realistic sounding moral discourse.

What a stable judgement amounts to on the quasi-realist account matters. Having a view on what stability is, or at the very least what it is to express a stable judgement, allows the quasi-realist to echo realistic sounding discourse. It is, after all, a normal part of ordinary moral discourse to make claims like the following “I know x is morally wrong”, “I am sure x is morally wrong” and so on. Egan construes a stable judgement as something troubling for the quasi-realist on a *de dicto* level, that is, he is not concerned with individual *de re* judgements that might be stable, but with the thought that there might be any judgement (whichever that might be) which might be stable (2009, p. 203).

For the quasi-realist knowledge claims are stable. In Blackburn’s later work, stability is also used to explain what a value is.<sup>28</sup> Blackburn writes that “the claim to knowledge entails, I think, the claim that no improved standpoint, yielding a revised estimate, is possible. To know something is to know that no judgement contradicting one’s own could be really preferable” (1993, p 90). If this is what a knowledge claim amounts to, then one may plausibly interpret it as strongly stable. It admits of no possible improved standpoint, that is no possibility of an improved judgement. In *Ruling Passions* Blackburn writes that a value is something I would be “set against” changing, I might resist changing my view over matter x. For Blackburn values are also stable: he writes “I shall locate our values in effect as our stable concerns” (1998, p. 9). A value is something resistant to change, we do not want anything to destabilise them (1998, p. 67). Blackburn writes “to hold a value, then, is typically to have a relatively stable disposition to conduct practical life

28 Of course, one might express a knowledge claim about a value. The point is that stability is central to understanding the quasi-realism.



and practical discussion in a particular way it is to be disposed or set in that way, and notably be set against change in this respect” (1998, p. 67).

Values are high up on what Blackburn calls the emotional staircase of practical and emotional ascent (1998, p 9, p. 68). Blackburn explains that the higher up the scale, the more deeply invested I am in the judgement. The more deeply invested I am, the stronger my emotional or practical reaction to you. (I say either practical or emotional reaction because, as Blackburn points out, there might well be ethical debates in which I do not act emotionally towards people with another point of view, but I might still have the strong reaction of condemnation and use practical means against you) (1998, p. 9-10, p 13).

Something at the bottom of the scale, my preference for carrot cake over a coffee cake for example, is a preference of mine at the bottom of the scale. I am not prepared to be hostile towards you if you volunteer the information that you prefer carrot cake over coffee cake. It would seem a bizarre reaction if, when you told me your cake preference, I submitted that we could no longer be friends. On the other hand, if we were in an argument about a moral issue, for example, women’s right to vote, it is not inconceivable that I might react with some hostility towards you if you argue that women should return to having no vote.

For Blackburn a value is stable, if whoever holds it resists revisions of it, and they will react emotionally if challenged. A value, as we’ve seen, can be explained in terms of both stability and being high up on the emotional staircase. When we contrast a value with a knowledge claim we see how strong stability appears to be at work in both cases, “being certain that X is good or right is having a settled attitude/rejecting the possibility that an improvement could result in a change” (1998, p 70). If someone has a value they can, of course, also express a knowledge claim about it; but talk of values as something separate from knowledge is illuminating because Köhler

focuses on the state of mind being expressed, and a value is, for Blackburn, a stable state of mind which is expressed. In both cases – stability and values – we appear to have cases of strong stability. Given the above it does not seem implausible for Egan and Köhler to have read quasi-realist stability as strong. In the next section, however, I will offer evidence to the contrary, and argue that Blackburn is best understood as advancing an account of antecedent stability.

## Two Readings of Quasi-Realist Stability: Antecedent Stability

The problem of fundamental error requires two assumptions to go through: 1. That for the quasi-realist stability must be strong, and 2. That our judgements are either strongly stable or not stable (i.e. that the only choice for the quasi-realist in explaining fundamental error is in terms of a dichotomy). The second claim follows from the first; if a stable judgement must admit of no possible improvement, then for a judgement to not be stable it must at least admit of some possible improvement.

We have just reviewed the evidence for Blackburn having a strong stability view. Now I will turn to the evidence that he holds what I call an antecedent view about stability. As Horgan and Timmons put it, Blackburn claims that the worry that I might be wrong in ordinary cases of error can be summarised as “being open to epistemic possibility” (2015, p. 191). That is, Blackburn’s ‘account’ of error includes a chance of improvement in the future.<sup>29</sup> In his reply to Egan, Blackburn writes “I do know in advance that if there are principles or commitments, whichever they may be, that are stable, they will in fact survive anything *I can currently* recognize as a process of improvement. That is the proper definition of stability” (2009, p. 6) [My italics.]

<sup>29</sup> I am hesitant to use the word “account” here, since Blackburn is not, given his quasi-realism, in the business of giving an account of error. See Blackburn, 2009 “Truth and A Priori Possibility: Egan’s Charge Against QuasiRealism”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 87, No. 2, pp. 201–213

For Blackburn stability should be seen in terms of current stability. We will see why this feature of stability is important when we discuss wide antecedent stability in section 8.

We see an antecedent stability account once again in *Ruling Passions* (1998). Blackburn, when discussing ethical knowledge, makes a clear antecedent stability statement:

“[...] perhaps I can contemplate as a bare possibility that some change should come along and ‘improve’ me into thinking that these are not after all standards for a good character. But I cannot really see how to take off the inverted commas, or in other words imagine how any such change would really be an improvement. The possibility remains idle, unreal. So I can properly claim to know that some things count as virtues and others do not” (1998, p. 307).

Entertaining the idle possibility that there might be an improvement to our current judgement is, at the very least, not as strong as the picture of stability we are offered by Egan. But it is not yet clear whether this form of stability can be successfully used against Egan. He might claim that the stability above can still be read as strong enough to sustain the tension. The stability on offer allows for idle possibility, but not any real possibility given that it would be difficult to imagine a change to your current judgement as an improvement. The lack of ability to imagine makes sense of why, on Blackburn’s view, we are resistant to changing our values. Perhaps, then, if one cannot imagine how a change would be an improvement in terms of a value I hold, stability is still strong enough to sustain the tension between stability and being mistaken.

To answer this problem we need to look at another aspect of Blackburn’s view on error, what I am calling his wide antecedent view. When Blackburn (1998) discusses entertaining the thought that I might be wrong about a judgement, he makes use of the principle which underlies wide antecedent stability. He writes “I think there is a real chance that improvement might undermine

my verdict, and this means that due caution prohibits me from claiming knowledge” (1998, p. 307). Of course, Blackburn is not discussing stable judgements here, since on his view a stable judgement (if the narrow antecedent view is correct) is one which only entertains an idle possibility. Rather, Blackburn is discussing reserving judgement, that is, withholding from calling something knowledge; entertaining real possible improvement for non-stable judgements is different. But I think Blackburn’s view is a helpful way of thinking about doubt about stable judgements too.

Next I want to consider how, given the evidence for a strong view in the previous section we can square this with the antecedent view I am suggesting here. Rather than our discussion of strong and antecedent stability hindering our understanding of quasi-realist stability, we can use it to read strong stability in a new and interesting light. For example, when Blackburn writes “the claim to knowledge entails, I think, the claim that no improved standpoint, yielding a revised estimate, is possible. To know something is to know that no judgement contradicting one’s own could be really preferable” (1993, p. 90) we can take him to be rejecting real possibilities, but not idle ones.

The mistake that Egan and Köhler have made, then, is to take Blackburn as having ruled out both real possibilities and idle possibilities. If one rules out both real and idle possibilities, then stability will be read as strong. If, however, we read Blackburn as only ruling out real possibilities for improvement – and since, for him, thinking about error is the only way one would entertain real possibilities – we can claim that Blackburn’s account of stability is not as strong as Egan and Köhler assume.

This reading of Blackburn, however, also generates a problem: it still accepts that there is a contrast between stability and error. Given this, Egan and Köhler might claim that they can

simply reapply the fundamental error problem. If stability amounts to only entertaining idle possibilities, and doubt amounts to entertaining real possibilities one might argue that we can never shift to doubting a stable view. For us to shift to doubt we would have to be able to take on board the real possibility that we might be wrong, but narrow stability by definition, removes real possibilities from consideration.

What the quasi-realist needs is an explanation of how one might go from a stable judgement to doubting that judgement. On Egan's argument strong stability hindered the quasi-realist from making such a move. If there is no room for any possible improvement, then there is nowhere to manoeuvre. However, if we accept that the quasi-realist must have a narrow antecedent view of stability, then there is a way for an idle possibility to become a real possibility. And this is because antecedent stability, as we have seen, is construed as current. It does not predict future certainty, rather it only allows for past and present stability (I have not been proved wrong, yet). We can imagine that when the quasi-realist claims something like "I currently stably judge x to be morally wrong", the current applies to the entertainment of idle possibilities too. My current judgement that x is morally wrong permits the possibility that those so far only idle possibilities – could become real. I will consider a solution to this problem in the next section. I will show that by viewing stability as current and by pairing it with an ideal advisor view the quasi-realist can escape the objection.

### **Doubt, Wide Antecedent Stability, and Ideal Advisors**

Let us consider wide antecedent stability in more detail and how it solves the fundamental error problem. I will address Köhler's reapplication of the problem in this section in more detail since it has not yet had a central focus in this paper. If I take a stable judgement to be something in which there is no feature that can lead to my abandonment of M and a mistaken judgement as

the judgement that there might be a feature that would lead to my abandonment of M, then there is an obvious tension. I am, on Köhler's quasi-realist version of his account of being in error, saying I simultaneously judge there to be no improving feature and that there might be an improving feature (2015, p. 165). Hence on Köhler's argument FIRST PERSON IMMUNITY reappears.

If we say, instead, that stability is to be accounted for by my judgement that there is no current improvement available to me, but there is an idle possibility that there might be an improvement in the future, and if we say that doubt over a stable judgement is entertaining a real possibility that there might be an improvement, then we can overcome the reapplication of the problem too. If successful shows that the quasi-realist can solve the fundamental error problem without recourse to removing the important difference between an improvement and a change from her account.

One may raise the objection that my reply is simply rehashing Egan's first person past or future error account. Recall that on the past or future accounts of error I will hold a false moral view or I did hold a false moral view. Crucially past or future error is explicitly about holding a false moral view in the past or future: I either think "I was wrong about x" or, "I will be wrong about x". Whereas my present moral error can be explained in terms of current stability: my attitude towards x is currently stable, but it being current allows for the possibility of change. A second concern is that my reply gives a descriptive solution, something which, if we are on board with Blackburn's reply, we don't need. According to this objection all I am doing is supplying a definition of stability, but I am failing to offer an account of what that stability consists in. And as we've seen, giving an account of what stability consists in is the focus of Köhler's reapplication of the problem. What I shall do next is to sketch which mental states an error attribution consists in whilst avoiding the reapplication of the problem.

The original problem the quasi-realist had to address was how to make sense of statements/judgements of the form “I judge x is morally right, but I might be wrong about that”. This can be expressed, given our discussion of Blackburn’s wide and narrow antecedent stability as:

(a) Stability: “I currently stably believe x is morally right due to my processes of improvement to date” (where stability is cashed out in terms of no current avenues for improvement, but because it is current it allows for future idle possible improvements).

(b) Mistaken: “and it is possible to revise that judgement due to a process of improvement in the future” (where possibility is cashed out in terms of real possibility).

Let us look again at what a stable judgement is on Köhler’s account and then see how my reply works when we put it into the same moral sensibility language Köhler uses.

A stable judgement: “the judgment that there is no real possibility of a sensibility  $S_x$  which is such that one would approve of preferring  $S_x$  to one’s current sensibility and which would lead one to abandon  $M$ ” (2015, p. 165).

My stable judgement comes about because I see that there is no current feature that would lead me to approve of sensibility  $S_x$  over my sensibility  $S$ . When I doubt my stable judgement I take it that there might be a real feature which my sensibility lacks a feature which I would approve of preferring (2015, p. 165). All we need, I've argued, to solve the problem is to make use of Blackburn's account of stability: make current stability a prominent feature, allow idle possibilities for stable judgements (where idleness is included in the stability being current), and use real possibilities for doubt. At present I currently see no real possible feature which would change my mind about my moral judgement ( $M$ ). And because Egan's original charge was focused on addressing the worry that I have a stable judgement but I might be wrong, all the quasi-realist must do is accommodate the notion of being presently stable, which doesn't rule out future unknown improvements.

In short, the task for the quasi-realist is not to give an account of fundamental error; she does not have to say what fundamental error is. Rather, the quasi-realist needs to give an account of what it is to doubt or worry about a stable judgement being wrong. If my judgement is currently stable, I can affirm that it has up until now had no available real possible improvements, but that in the future it could. If we use Blackburn's approach in this way, then we don't need to incur the problem of improvement and change.

There are two objections to this solution that we need to consider. The first we considered earlier; the claim that even with this understanding of stability and doubt it is not clear how the quasi-realist can doubt a stable judgement. And the second objection that the quasi-realist, by not removing the "I recognise" clause, induces SMUGNESS. It seems in all these cases that for me to doubt a stable judgement I still need to recognise something as an improvement. If I need to recognise the improvement, then I seem to be blocked from knowledge in some important sense. In other words, if stability is construed in terms of what I currently recognise to only be



idle possibilities, then it is conceivable that I might not be able to make the move to entertaining real possibilities in order to doubt the stable judgement.

One solution to both objections is to think of narrow and wide antecedent stability in terms of an ideal advisor. Here I am drawing on work by James Lenman (2003), and I believe a view of this kind naturally comes out of Blackburn's quasi-realism (although it is beyond the scope of this paper to make a case for this). On this view, where thinking about an ideal version of yourself is explained in terms of attitudes we can hopefully find an expressivist friendly way to think about how to doubt a stable judgement, and how to not be SMUG.

On an ideal advisor view of the kind Lenman advances (2003) approval is non-cognitive and this should fit well with Blackburn's quasi-realism. I will develop Lenman's view to try to show how an ideal advisor view can explain how one can shift from a stable judgement to doubt about a stable judgement. Narrow antecedent stability might be construed as a match between you and your ideal advisor. Your ideal advisor in this case just is an improved version of you. You with a perfect process of improvement – such as sympathy – which you admire. It is this aspect which I believe is why it fits well with Blackburn's view. Then there is Regular You, you who admires these processes but might not possess them to a perfect degree. Regular You has a stable judgement about  $x$  where she both approves of approving no sensibility  $S_x$  which is such that one would approve of preferring  $S_x$  to one's current sensibility and which would lead one to abandon  $M$ , and you believe that Ideal You also holds the same view regarding  $x$ . You then approve of approving that both Regular and Ideal You match on your judgement about  $x$ , but since you are not ideal, you allow for the idle possibility that you might be wrong about what Ideal You thinks. In contrast, when you doubt something this is a case of Regular You and Ideal You not matching up.

You might consider whether *y* is wrong, you have stably believed *y* to be wrong (still allowing for some idle possibility and up to the current moment having no reason to believe otherwise), but upon reflection of what Ideal You would think you realise there is a mismatch. Ideal You and Regular You do not match up. Given this mismatch you start to doubt that your judgement is correct. Importantly this view retains the “I recognise” clause. It also allows the quasi-realist to escape the SMUGNESS objection. Even though I recognise the real possibility for improvement in the doubt case due to my mismatch between Ideal Me and Regular Me, it is not dependent on me that this recognition appears. That is, given that there is a difference between Ideal and Regular You this allows me to escape SMUGNESS. Ideal You is not Regular You. Recognition of a real possible improvement is only possible in virtue of the fact that Regular You is not Ideal You. One might reply that you still need to recognise the mismatch and Regular You might be unable to do this and so we end up with the SMUGNESS verdict. But this is a little premature.

Suppose Regular You thinks eating cake is morally wrong. When you thought about whether your judgement was stable or not suppose you were thinking about whether it matched with Ideal You or not. If you were to think that your judgement has only the remote possibility of being wrong, then you also think it matches with a perfect version of you, one who has perfect processes of improvement like sympathy, coherence, and openness to information (to borrow a few from Blackburn). It would, however, be implausible to consider yourself *automatically* perfect in that regard. Rather, the claim that I am not perfect should prompt reflecting on the very processes you admire in Ideal You. Thinking about Ideal You should prompt what Blackburn calls an imaginarius focus where we think about our possible best set of attitudes as a practical goal (1998, p. 313). Ideal You, then, works much like an imaginarius focus. Thinking about them should prompt a reflection on whether there is a mismatch. It might, for example, make you gather more information about cake to see whether it really is a moral issue. This, then, should hopefully show an avenue the quasi-realist can take for constructing a plausible answer to the

problems raised in this section of the paper and allow the quasi-realist to explain how she can doubt a stable judgement without removing admiration from her account, nor falling foul of Egan's original fundamental error problem or Köhler's reapplication of it.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued against Egan's fundamental error argument and Köhler's reapplication of the problem. I have given two readings of Blackburn's account of stability and argued that his account favours an antecedent type of stability which can accommodate idle and real possibilities for error. I've argued that by understanding Blackburn's nuanced account of stability, the quasi-realist can reply to both Egan and Köhler.

However, there is still a problem with Blackburn's response to Egan, because it removes admiration from his account. I argue that this is a reason to reject his solution in its current form because a removal of admiration diminishes the quasi-realist distinction between an improvement and a change. I claim, then, that we need to solve the problem whilst including admiration in our account of stable doubt in such a way that we can avoid SMUGNESS. I argue, crucially, that the ideal quasi-real sheds light on how Blackburn's real/idle possibility distinction can explain what it is to doubt a stable judgement. I've argued that ideal quasi-realism can successfully explain this distinction and show that the quasi-realist can give a successful solution to the fundamental error problem.

# Chapter 3. Quasi-Realism, Relativism, and Moral Authority

## Introduction

I argue that the quasi-realist still needs to reply to the relativist. I begin by claiming that relativism problems are rooted in the problem of equal judgements. That is, if the upshot of a theory which aims to support the view that our judgements are not all equal is the verdict that our moral judgements are all equal to another, then that theory fails. There are two versions of relativism that I focus on to make this point, Narrow Truth Relativism, which requires truth as a decider between judgements. And Broad Equality Relativism, which is unconcerned with truth, but is concerned with what can (if anything) decide between judgements.

After showing that Broad Equality Relativism is the more pressing problem for the quasi-realist, I argue that our moral discourse includes features like moral authority, sincerity, and the notion that some judgements are better than others. The aim of the quasi-realist is to explain and justify our realist sounding ordinary moral discourse, and if these features are a part of our discourse, then the quasi-realist must explain and justify them. If Broad Equality relativism is true, however, then the quasi-realist cannot explain and justify crucial features of our discourse, and so her philosophical programme fails. I look at how Simon Blackburn responds to both Narrow Truth Relativism and Broad Equality Relativism and argue that both of his replies are unsuccessful. I then suggest an argument the relativist can give: the revised relativism objection. On this

objection, the relativist can ask how the quasi-realist accommodates one judgement being better than another on a metaethical level.

Blackburn's response to Broad Equality Relativism is to give a first order reply. That is, he claims that we can say one judgement is better than another because of how we came to have that judgement, for example, if we held a judgement and formed it because we were open to new legitimate information, or because we are free from biases. The first order reply, I argue, fails to answer the revised relativist, first because the reply uses first order discourse in its explanation, which is the very thing the quasi-realist intends to explain and justify. Second, because Blackburn's reply, even if it was successful, does not explain how one judgement can be better than another in cases where both people engaged in a disagreement are neither close minded, nor biased. I argue that my theory, ideal quasi-realism, can solve the revised relativism problem because it offers a metaethical answer that explains and justifies features of our moral discourse, it also satisfies the intuitions of the relativist, without succumbing to realism.

You are having a conversation with your friend John. At some point during your conversation John abruptly announces that he thinks cold blooded murder is morally right. You want to tell John that he is morally wrong, and you do so. You explain your reasons for why you think his view is wrong. John responds, offering his reasons. A disagreement ensues. When you are confronted with John's moral judgement, you not only take him to be wrong, you take yourself to be right that John is wrong. You think there is at least some authority to your judgement, and no such authority can be allocated to John's judgement. It is on the basis of this authority that you find it appropriate to tell John he is wrong; you think your judgement is better.

Problems of relativism target the support that underlies the moral authority we assume our moral judgements have. Typically, objections from relativism are one of two kinds; those focused on what I call Narrow Truth Relativism, and those focused on what I call Broad Equality Relativism. The central claim of the former is that if a theory results in plural truths, where singular truth is required for the acceptability of the theory, then it fails. The main claim of the latter is that a theory which requires that not all judgements be equal delivers judgements which are all equal and so it is unacceptable.

A broad brush version of the Broad Equality relativity challenge I'm concerned with goes like this: because quasi-realism explains normative judgements via an account of attitudes, there is no way to say which attitudes are better and which attitudes are worse. If the quasi-realist has no resources to explain how one attitude can be better than another, then all of our judgements are as good as one another. The quasi-realist aims to echo our realist sounding discourse. The ability to claim one judgement is better than one another is part of our realist sounding moral discourse. The notion that we can claim moral authority for our judgements is needed for our ability to claim one judgement is better than another.<sup>30</sup> But if all of our judgements are as good as one another - that is, if for the quasi-realist all of our judgements are on an equal footing - then the quasi-realist fails to echo realist sounding discourse. If she fails in this endeavour, then quasi-realism fails in its aims.

<sup>30</sup> Quasi-realists would rather use "confidence" here, rather than "moral authority", to avoid the assumption that quasi-realists intend to echo the realist with a capital R. Here, however, I am going to use "moral authority" because it captures the sense that there is a potential loss to specific moral authority, rather than a loss of normative confidence.

## **The Relativism Problem: Narrow and Broad**

Although I have categorised the relativism problem in two ways – Narrow Truth Relativism and Broad Equality Relativism – both are fundamentally concerned with the equality of judgements.

Typically, when we think of a Narrow Truth Relativism problem we think of the following: according to whatever account we are criticising, there is some “plurality of truth”<sup>31</sup>; if there is a plurality of truth, then there’s no way for us to say one way or another which ethical judgement is the correct one because truth is relevantly dependent on the individual.

The relativist claims that on this version of the objection the problem lies in the supposed equality of judgements. Truth is taken as the decider between judgements, and if a theory does not have a theory of truth that allows for this (or a theory of truth at all), then there is nothing in terms of truth which allows for speakers to argue for correctness. In other words, all speakers’ judgements are equal. In contrast, a Broad Equality Relativism does not focus on truth or lack thereof, rather, it defends a broader equality claim: we want to say that judgement x is better than judgement y, and the theory in question cannot do this. Correctness, on this version of the problem, is not determined by truth, but a notion that a judgement can be right or better than others is still at stake.

Both versions of the relativism problem are (if successful) a threat to quasi-realism. The quasi-realist, in her aim to echo realist sounding moral discourse, cannot allow for relativism to be an

<sup>31</sup> I’m borrowing this phrase from Blackburn (1999), it sums up very neatly the problem Narrow Truth Relativism targets.

implication of her philosophical programme. If it is, then quasi-realism will not be able to explain and justify the sort of judgements the moral realist makes.

The quasi-realist will happily claim that she has all the resources needed to explain realist sounding discourse. She has deflationary truth, and she has what Carter and Christman (2012) calls “the core expressivist manoeuvre” at her disposal. Cuneo (2018) explains the three steps of the expressivist manoeuvre, he writes:

The first step is to switch the subject: rather than concern itself with traditional metanormative topics such as what normative properties or facts are (or would be), expressivism concerns itself with what it is to express a normative judgement or engage in normative discourse (of a given kind). The second step is to offer a distinctive, expressivist account of what normative thought and discourse are. At first approximation, this account rejects the claim that normative thought and discourse have normative representational content, maintaining instead that they express attitudes of commendation and condemnation. The third step consists in expressivists concluding- after having defended their views about the character of normative thought and discourse- that they (in their role as theorists) can ‘just stop talking’ about normative reality and, instead, issue first-order normative judgements (2018, p. 18)

On the third step even though a problem may seem metaethical, it should be read as a problem of normativity. For example, when asked how the quasi-realist deals with mind-independence judgements like “kicking dogs is morally wrong” she claims that this judgement should be read as a question of what we should accept on a first order level. It is the third move which I will



focus on in section 5, but before we turn to problems with how the quasi-realist deals with relativism challenges, we need to look at one specific problem in more detail.

### **The Relativism Problem: Broadly Speaking**

Echoing realist sounding moral discourse, the relativist might say, is more than the mere utterance of what sound like mind independence judgements, after all, I can utter what sounds like a mind-independent judgement, but not really mean it. Although it is possible that some people never really mean the moral judgements they utter, I assume that generally people not only utter moral judgements, but sincerely utter them. That is, they are expressing moral judgements they really do hold. If this is how we should conceive of ordinary moral discourse, then the quasi-realist must explain and justify not only the utterance of moral judgements, but the sincerity that comes with it.

The relativist needs to motivate the sincerity claim a little, so let us do just that. Quasi-realism is one answer to Mackie's (1977) error theory. On Mackie's view our moral discourse sounds realist, and is intended to be realist, but we are all at fault for supposing this to be so. Objective values do not exist, and thus, we are all in error when we utter realist sounding but ultimately false moral judgements. The quasi-realist responds to Mackie by claiming that our discourse is not realist, but realist sounding. Our moral discourse, it turns out, can be explained and justified via anti-realism (in Blackburn's case projectivism).<sup>32</sup> Anti-realism can vindicate what sounds realistic, but isn't really, neatly sidestepping the supposed error.

<sup>32</sup> I will use projectivism and expressivism interchangeably in this paper because they both name the same thing for Blackburn.

If our discourse is not sincere, then the motivation to save moral discourse from error theory diminishes because there would be nothing, strictly speaking, to save. Imagine that we did live in a community where everyone knows that everyone else didn't sincerely mean their own moral utterances. In this society, judgements about moral truth would not be false, instead, they wouldn't seem to communicate anything at all. A lack of sincere judgements would result in a society in which no one was quite sure what someone meant by "it's true that murder is wrong". On this basis we assume ordinary speakers are (at least mostly) being sincere. When they say "it's true that murder is wrong" we assume they really do hold<sup>33</sup> the judgement that murder is wrong and (from the theoretical positioning of quasi-realism as an answer to error theory) they also want to express something realist sounding about murder being wrong. Let us cache a claim for later on:

SINCERITY: If I accept a moral judgement, this means I sincerely accept it.

I have suggested that the quasi-realist is not only required to echo features of realist discourse like properties and truth, but also the sincerity that comes along with a discourse that seems to aim at the truth. Blackburn, however, might disagree. He writes that the propositional surface that requires justification amounts to "the fact that we voice our reactions in very much the way in which we describe facts" (1996, p. 83 - 84). We could read this in two ways. On the first reading, "propositional surface" amounts to claims about properties, truth, and so forth. In other words, the quasi-realist only has to make sense of the features which we normally associate with propositions. If she can make sense of what Harcourt (2005) calls "T-Features", then she has

<sup>33</sup> I use "hold" and "accept" interchangeably because I take their meaning to be the same, but if this is wrong, I am happy to be corrected.

secured her victory against Mackie's (1977) error theory. Blackburn's strategy is to offer a minimalist account of truth (following Horwich, 1990) which accounts for a moral discourse that sounds like it is talking in terms of truth and fact. We might, then, given the resources at the quasi-realist's disposal, suppose that they are off the hook. She can, you might think, use a minimalist account to secure the T-Features of our discourse, but this would be too quick.

On the second reading of what it is to echo realist sounding discourse, the quasi-realist needs to say more, and she needs to say more precisely because of the motivation for the first reading. Recall that quasi-realism positions itself as an answer to Mackie's error theory. It is a solution which attempts to provide a way to keep all of the realist sounding features of our discourse, without admitting error. Blackburn writes, "But many contemporary philosophers have felt, with John Mackie, that ethics purports to be 'something more'. We think of ethical facts, they say, as independent, objective, demanding, and none of this is explicable by expressivism [...] To show that such objections are misguided, I invented the persona I call the 'quasi-realist,' who attempts to remove these obstacles from the expressivist position" (1996, p. 83).

If we suppose for the sake of argument that a minimalist theory of truth is successful, then the quasi-realist does earn her right to say "it's true that's murder is wrong", but this is all she earns. She earns the right to utter the word "true" and to make sense whilst doing it, but minimalism cannot (and indeed, the quasi-realist would say it does not) do all of the work in explaining and justifying our ordinary moral discourse.

Minimalism makes the claim that truth does not add anything over and above the sentences it deflates to, but it doesn't tell us what we are expressing: projectivism or as Blackburn now calls

it, expressivism, does that<sup>34</sup>. It is expressivism, and not minimalism, which ultimately explains and justifies our ordinary moral discourse. This is a priority claim of a particular sort.

Expressivism is more central and important to quasi-realism than minimalism. If “it’s true that p” is the same as saying “p”, then it is what saying “p” amounts to that matters. Minimalism can help the expressivist legitimately use the word “truth” in her utterances, but it is bolted onto our judgements. This is plausible in two ways. First, if minimalism allows the quasi-realist to say “it’s true that murder is wrong”, and if this comes down to saying “murder is wrong”, then expressivism tells us what we express when we say murder is wrong. Second, by answering error theory and denying that our ordinary moral discourse is in error, the quasi-realist is committed to explaining realist sounding features of our moral discourse. And not all of these features can be accommodated by minimalism.

Objectivity, for example, is given an expressivist treatment, we can see this in Blackburn’s reply to the relativist. Minimalism, I want to claim, can only cover some of the features of our ordinary moral discourse, it cannot cover them all. Moral authority is one of those features. I’ve already spoken a little of what I mean by moral authority above, but let us look at what Bertrand Russell has to say to drive the point home.

“Certainly there *seems* to be something more. Suppose, for example, that some one were to advocate the introduction of bullfighting in this country. In opposing the proposal, I should feel, not only that I were expressing my desires, but that my desires in the matter are *right*” (1977, p. 34).

<sup>34</sup> Blackburn calls his anti-realism projectivism in his earlier work (1984), but moves to calling it expressivism in his later work (1998).

If quasi-realism is an answer to error theory, then they have to contend with such notions. In addition if, as the quasi-realist claims, our moral discourse is practical (Blackburn, 1999, 1998), and if that practicality is rooted in accepting or rejecting judgements (and persuading others to accept or reject judgements), then confidence in one's own judgements is paramount to the echoing enterprise. For you to accept a judgement, you also need to be confident that the judgement is right.

This claim is a little fuzzy, so let us try to make it a little clearer. One might object and claim that it's possible for Bob to accept a judgement and not be confident he is right. For example, he might accept a judgement about mathematics but not be confident he is right about it because he has very little knowledge of mathematics. But this example is not applicable to the claim I am making about moral discourse. In particular, in cases of moral disagreement it seems plausible that Anna's acceptance of a judgement also means she thinks she is right, because otherwise, why would Anna defend her judgement? One might say that she might doubt her accepted judgement, but in that sort of case, it no longer seems like she is accepting anything.

It is this notion of confidence and the threat of losing it that the relativist targets. Let us file away a claim from the above discussion which will become important later:

**MORAL AUTHORITY:** It is part of our ordinary realist sounding moral discourse that we consider our own moral judgements to have authority, that is, you are confident that you are right about your judgement x.

## Blackburn on Quasi-Realism and Relativism

To recap, I've argued that the judgements we express in moral discourse are ones we sincerely accept, and acceptance of these judgements entails confidence that those judgements are right. The quasi-realist, I've argued, must accept both SINCERITY and MORAL AUTHORITY, as part of the realist sounding discourse that they intend to explain and justify. We have also looked at what relativity problems amount to, and I've focused on Broad Equality Relativism as the key issue for the quasi-realist. Let us look in more depth at Broad Equality Relativism to show why we should be primarily concerned with it instead of Narrow Equality Relativism. I'm going to look at Blackburn's (1999) discussion of relativism. I'll start by briefly explaining Blackburn's discussion in which he is primarily concerned with the Narrow Truth Relativism problem, before moving onto Blackburn's discussion the Broad Equality Relativism problem. Blackburn writes:

There is no problem of relativism. Why not? There is no problem of relativism because there is no problem of moral truth. Since moral opinion is not in the business of representing the world, but of assessing choices and actions and attitudes in the world, to wonder which attitude is right is to wonder which attitude to adopt or endorse (1999, p. 214).

Blackburn writes that when the relativist claims something like, "well it's true for the Taliban that women should not be educated" (1999, p. 215) this is simply a way of saying that the Taliban accepts the claim that women should not be educated. When Blackburn makes this sort of claim his truth minimalism is on full view. On this view of truth uttering "it's true that x" is no

different to uttering “x”, the predicate does no extra work, nor does it add anything new (Blackburn, 1998) (Horwich, 1990).

Blackburn considers that the relativist might respond by claiming that the truth relativism problem is not the issue, rather the risk of quasi-realism leading to the equality of judgements is the issue. On this objection if we don't have a substantial theory of truth, then we end up with an equality of attitudes. That is, without truth as a right-maker, all of our attitudes are on a par. But truth, Blackburn counters, does not tell us whether a judgement or action is permissible. The metaphysics doesn't influence our moral verdicts.

This is an unsurprising reply given Blackburn's truth minimalism; the truth isn't doing any extra work for us normatively, it doesn't inform us of whether should accept or reject a course of action. Thus, even if our theory lacks a theory of robust truth (whether it is lacking due to accepting a minimalist theory, or lacking due to a rejection of all theories of truth), this won't result in all of our judgements being on a par. The wrongness of an action, for the quasi-realist, lies in the cruelty of the action (Blackburn, 1999, p. 217). For Blackburn, it's a mistake to argue that judgements are all on a par for the quasi-realist if she accepts minimalist truth. It is not truth which determines whether a judgement is better than another. This gives us another claim to file away.

BETTER: One judgement can be better than another, and it is not in virtue of truth or falsity that a judgement is better or worse.

As Kirchin (2000) claims, the heart of the relativity problem is not focused on truth but on the claim that our judgements might be on an equal footing, i.e. that my judgement is no better than yours. Ultimately both forms of the problem come down to equality. Truth relativism problems are about judgement equality, but they are only a subset of a broader problem. Blackburn's claim that there is no problem of relativism rings false, because there is more to relativism problems than truth. As Kirchin rightly points out, it is plausible for the relativist to pose their question in terms of which judgement is better rather than in terms of truth. And so Blackburn needs to modify his claim. It is not the case that there is no problem of relativism because there is no problem of truth, instead that there is no problem of Narrow Truth Equality Relativism, because there is no problem of moral truth.

The worry of Broad Equality Relativism, however, lingers, and Blackburn addresses this kind of worry by considering the claim that quasi-realism might not satisfactorily explain objectivity. The relativist might object: "the quasi-realist can't really make objectivity claims, but she needs to if she wants to achieve the aims of quasi-realism; after all, we want to make the claim to be holding the right judgement when we argue about a moral matter". Blackburn's strategy, which following Kirchin I will call the First Order Response, is to consider what we might mean by objectivity. He goes through a few different meanings, but I'll focus on only one. On this consideration the trouble starts with Nagel's (1997) worry that if we accept that our judgements are down to us, that is, if they are dependent on us, then it renders them equal. If our judgements are equal on a dependent account, then the assumption that our moral judgements have moral authority is undermined.

The quasi-realist, Blackburn argues, doesn't have to accept that all judgements are equal. It may be that our judgements are "just us", but they are "just us" free from various sorts of biases and



defects in our thinking. We can say that the judgement that “women should not be educated” is worse than a judgement which claims women should be educated because it was produced by these various defects. Misogyny, racism, and various other bias can interfere with our judgement formation.

We can think of the “just us” worry as the concern that the quasi-realist’s anti-realism is not enough to support MORAL AUTHORITY, and in turn, it fails to support BETTER. Recall that moral authority is the following:

MORAL AUTHORITY: It is part of our ordinary realist sounding moral discourse that we consider our own moral judgements to have authority, that is, we are confident that we are right about the judgements we sincerely accept.

And BETTER is:

BETTER: One judgement can be better than another, and it is not in virtue of truth or falsity that a judgement’s is better or worse.

What the relativist needs to do is connect MORAL AUTHORITY and BETTER, and this is easily done. We already saw that on SINCERITY, if I accept a judgement I accept it sincerely. And I’ve argued that if we accept a judgement sincerely, then MORAL AUTHORITY follows. That is, if we sincerely accept a judgement, we also think it is right. If we think our sincere judgements are right, then it follows that we think some judgements can be better than others.

That is, if I think my judgement x is right, then when I compare it with another judgement y, I will think that my judgement x is better than another judgement y.

Recall that Kirchin claims that Blackburn's first response to the relativism problem misfires because it is not a broad enough answer for the relativist. He suggests that the relativist can simply press her question in a different way: "truth aside, what makes your judgement better than anyone else's?" Kirchin, however, supports Blackburn's second, first order, response. The view that we can differentiate between views based on their openness and sensitivity to new information. Kirchin acknowledges that the relativist can press her case once more, she can still ask "but why is being free from misogyny better?" (200, p. 419). But he claims that the relativist continuing to press her case is not fatal to the quasi-realist.

Indeed, he claims this is simply a necessary weakness of an antirealist account that rejects robustly independent moral facts. The weakness is not fatal, however, "because there is nothing satisfactory that can be said to ethical relativists once they are in the grip of ethical relativism. If they ask why it is that pain, loss of freedom, conflict and so on are ethically bad things, then Blackburn will hold his hands up and state that he cannot say much more. If you cannot see that such things are ethically bad then it is clear that nothing will convince you" (2000, p. 419). The relativist can still, however, press a different version of her question, one that is not aimed at the first order level, but rather, the second. She can ask, "What makes our judgements better or worse, on a metaethical level?"

## The Revised Relativism Problem

The relativist can ask “how does the quasi-realist account for BETTER on a metaethical level?” This relativist target is not our ethical judgements, but the metaethical account which explains them. This is where Narrow Truth Equality gets its grip, it is asking for something distinctive which will explain BETTER. On the narrow version of the problem the relativist thinks only truth can do this, but on Broad Equality Relativism truth is no longer seen as the only thing that can explain BETTER. Instead the relativist’s question is more wide reaching: if not truth, then whence BETTER?” The relativist claims that the quasi-realist cannot provide anything distinctive in her metaethics to explain what it is to think a judgement is better than others. The quasi-realist aim, the relativist continues, demands such an explanation.

Recall that the quasi-realist aims to explain and justify our ordinary realist sounding moral discourse. In other words, the quasi-realist intends to explain and justify moral judgements like “x is morally better than y”. Judgements of this kind, I have said, have SINCERITY, MORAL AUTHORITY, and BETTER underlying them. Given the aim of quasi-realism, all of these features which are part of the judgement “x is morally better than y” need to be both explained and justified. The obvious query to raise at this juncture is why the quasi-realist cannot use Blackburn’s first order response to respond to the revised relativist’s objection. I will offer an explanation for this in the next section.

## Rejecting the First Order Reply

Ned and John are having a moral disagreement. Ned thinks women should be educated and John thinks they should not. Ned thinks his judgement is better than John's (he also thinks his judgement is right, and he holds his judgement sincerely). John thinks his judgement is right, he holds his judgement sincerely, and thinks it is better than Ned's. Recall that the first order reply is a response to Broad Equality Relativism, the worry that if quasi-realism is true and Ned and Ted are expressing attitudes dependent on themselves, then Ned and Ted can't really make a claim to having the better judgement. On the first order reply the quasi-realist claims that Ned can say his judgement is better than John's because he is free from various biases and has access to more legitimate and relevant information. So, it seems like quasi-realism can explain why one judgement is better than the other. Ned can say that even though he and John are deploying only their attitudes, it is his (Ned's) access to more reputable information which makes his attitude better than John's.

The relativist, however, will not be satisfied with this answer. If we accept that Ned's judgement is better than John's, then we need a metaethical explanation and justification of this. If not, then there is an explanatory gap. Why do we need such an explanation on a metaethical level? Because the quasi-realist aims to explain and justify our realist sounding moral discourse if projectivism is true (1984, p. 180). Quasi-realism, the relativist can claim, has a direction of fit. That is, on the quasi-realist account they intend to use their metaethics

to justify ethics, not the other way around. We have a realist sounding moral discourse, and projectivism needs to explain and justify that discourse.<sup>35</sup>

Since it is the metaethics which explains and justifies the first order ethics, the relativist will continue, then we should expect a metaethical answer rather than a first order one to a Broad Equality Relativism. The quasi-realist cannot respond to an objection with a first order explanation and justification because first order discourse is the very thing the quasi-realist is trying to explain and justify.

If I am right about this, then the quasi-realist has a direction of fit built into their account. The quasi-realist seeks to explain and justify realistic sounding moral discourse. The quasi-realist can achieve this via various routes, but Blackburn chooses the projectivist account of attitudes. And so on his view it is an account of attitudes which explain and justify our moral discourse. In addition, the quasi-realist has a preservation obligation. It is no good simply explaining moral discourse any old way, they must explain it in order to preserve it as realistic sounding. And so it must preserve what we ordinarily take to be realistic moral discourse, something which includes MORAL AUTHORITY, BETTER, and SINCERITY.

The line of argument above suggests that the quasi-realist must offer a metaethical explanation and justification to a Broad Relativity charge, and even though this sheds light on a target for the relativist, it does not fully explain why we can't use the first order response quite yet. Let us look, then, at a few objections against the first order reply. One

<sup>35</sup> A small but necessary note on this, Blackburn is very clear that quasi-realism and projectivism are separate. That is, one can agree that our moral discourse is realist sounding but not realist, nor in error, and seek to justify and explain it. And one can be a projectivist, but not have the aims of the quasi-realist. The important point is that for Blackburn his projectivism is doing the explanatory and justificatory work to earn the right to our realist sounding moral discourse, and so the target for any relativist concerned with quasi-realism is going to be her anti-realism.

quick objection, which is aside from the metaethical relativity charge, is the claim that by offering such a response the quasi-realist is showing her programme to not be unique in how an explanation of BETTER can be offered. After all, a realist might claim that they can provide the same answer, but that their theory has less problems than the quasi-realist. This line of argument would take us away from the main scope of the argument, however, so let us focus on an objection closer to home.

The first order response can be read as having two claims. A judgement can be seen as better if it is free from biases, and it can be seen as better if the judgement was formed with the right information, or if the person has an openness to information. On the first claim, the revised relativist will argue that this is just a first order judgement in disguise. We may say that Ned's judgement is better because his judgement is free from misogyny, but it is ultimately better because of another moral judgement of ours: misogyny is morally bad. If Ned's judgement is fundamentally viewed as better because of a moral judgement, then the problem remains: the relativist can still demand a metaethical explanation and justification for why Ned's judgement is better. Further, it looks as if moral judgements about moral judgements might go on *ad infinitum*!

On the second claim, where Ned's openness to information is evidence for Ned's judgement being better than John's, this encounters problems of generality. In cases like Ned and John's where they disagree about women being educated, we know that Ned is open to information, not close minded to new information and so on. But not all cases of moral disagreement are like this; it is at the very least possible for there to be cases of moral disagreement where both parties are well informed, open to new information, have good

critical skills, and so on. For example, two experts on climate change may have differing views on which liberties of citizens should be limited in order to save the planet.

So, if openness to information and like processes of judgement are the bases for claiming one judgement is better than another, then in those cases where both parties have equal processes of judgement, we cannot say one judgement is better than another, and it seems, like this would violate BETTER. Further, claims that being open to new information allows for BETTER might be subject to the second objection too.

It might well be the case that the reason we think Ned's judgement is better is because he is open to new information in a critically sound way, and it might be that being open to new information is salient for us because we judge that being open to new information in a critically sound way is good. Of course, this form of response is a little tricky to get going, since it is plausible that "good" here, does not have to mean morally good. But before we get off track and launch a discussion on whether what is good is also morally good, let us return to the main focus of the paper and see if the quasi-realist can offer a reply.

### **Ideal Quasi-Realism, You're My Only Hope**

The situation might seem bleak for the quasi-realist, but she can still reply to the revised relativist. The first reply she can give is to deny the direction of fit claim. The revised relativity objection assumes that there is a clear-cut nature between the metaethical and the first order. As we have seen, the revised relativity objection contains the assumption that the metaethical always explains and justifies the ethical. But the quasi-realist can deny this

assumption. She can claim that there is no clear cut direction of fit. The first order level informs the metaethical, new information can lead to improved attitudes, adopting new improved processes, and so on. So when the quasi-realist cites BETTER in terms of first order judgements, she can still tell a metaethical story about this.

This reply, however, misfires, and it misfires for two reasons. First, even if the first order can inform the metaethical, the interaction is informative, whereas the interaction from the metaethical to the ethical is explanatory and justificatory. Second, the revised relativist is asking for a metaethical explanation of BETTER. If the quasi-realist suggests that BETTER is still accommodated by first order discourse which is attached to a metaethical explanation, it still puts the priority on first order discourse. BETTER is ultimately justified by first order talk, but this makes quasi-realism seem redundant. If we can explain BETTER via first order talk, then why bother being a quasi-realist at all? Second, BETTER being justified by first order discourse misses the distinction between informative interaction and explanatory interaction. So, the direction of fit claim still seems to stand.

If this is the case, then the quasi-realist can still respond, but she needs to change the location of BETTER. She can do this in two ways. First as a rejection of the first order response, and second as a classic step in the expressivist manoeuvre where BETTER is to be understood as what it is to express that one judgement is better than another, not what the external BETTER-maker would be (like truth).<sup>36</sup> She can still allow for first order interaction, for example new information leads to improved judgements. But it is not in virtue of being open to new information that BETTER is explained, rather BETTER is explained via her

<sup>36</sup> This refers to the brief section on the expressivist manoeuvre in section two.



metaethics. And the quasi-realist already has a story to tell, one of stable judgements and improvements.

She can say that BETTER is an expression of a stable judgement, that is, when she expresses current approval of approving a match between herself and an ideal version of herself<sup>37</sup>.

Note that this is not simply approving of an ideal advisor, rather it is approval of the match itself. For example, Ned expresses BETTER by expressing approval of approving the match between himself and Ideal Ned. With the understanding that Ideal Ned has access to all the relevant information, has no biases, and so on. This allows for Blackburn's strategy but with a metaethical slant.

Why is Ned's judgement that women should be educated better than John's judgement that women should not be educated? Because regular Ned, with his access to new information (and other processes) matches, (Ned approves of approving the match he has) with Ideal Ned's processes of information. To be clear what makes Ned's judgement better is because it matches with Ideal Ned. This still allows for the first order being informative, but it places the justification and explanation of BETTER on the metaethics. Nonetheless one might wonder why we need what I'm calling Ideal Advisor Quasi-Realism to answer the revised relativist rather than Blackburn's Quasi-Realism. After all, Blackburn's quasi-realism makes use of stability and improvement in his metaethical story.

I've written about how Blackburn's account of stability encounters trouble when it is used to explain fundamental error, and I've argued that Ideal Advisor Quasi-Realism is more

<sup>37</sup> This is a development of James Lenman's ideal advisor view (2003), where he makes use of an ideal advisor but the approval is of the ideal advisor version of yourself, and not the match between regular and ideal you.

successful. But in terms of the scope of this paper, one advantage of Ideal Quasi-Realism over Blackburn's quasi-realism is that it captures the relativist's intuition that there should be something external to be what indicates correctness without actually giving an external account. The match between regular Ned and Ideal Ned offers something quasi external, which despite being still linked to Ned is not wholly dependent on him. One way of thinking about this is in terms of Ned thinking about how best to construct a table sent to him by IKEA. There's regular Ned, contemplating the best way to set up the table, and there is an ideal version of how to set up the table located in the set-up instructions for the table. Ned's judgement has gone a bit wrong when he strays from the instructions, and Ned's judgement is better when he sticks to the instructions. And this can be expressed in terms of approval of approval of a match with an ideal.

One problem with this analogy is it sounds like it would apply better to a moral realist theory than to anything the ideal quasi-realist would want to say. The reason I've used it, is to not claim that there is a best set of attitudes, or best ideal advisor in the same way that there is a best way to assemble the table. Rather, it is intended to show how, if there is something ideal in a particular context, for example, a set of instructions, then this has more authority over whatever is non-ideal in that context (in this example, Ned trying to come up with his own rules for making the table). In the moral context, then, the ideal advisor is intended to have the same normative function as the instructions for the table.

## **Conclusion**

I've argued that the relativist can still press her Broad Equality Objection further in the form of a revised relativism objection which targets the quasi-realist's metaethics. She can ask how the quasi-realist can explain BETTER on a metaethical level. I've claimed that the quasi-

realist must respond to this form of argument because BETTER, SINCERITY, and MORAL AUTHORITY are all part of the realist sounding moral discourse she intends to explain and justify. I've argued that the quasi-realist can defend herself from a revised relativism objection, but she must reject Blackburn's first order response to do so. Finally, I've argued that an ideal quasi-realism can save the quasi-realist from the revised relativism objection.

## **Chapter 4. Quasi-Realism and Metaethical Neutrality**

### **Introduction: What is Metaethical Neutrality?**

The claim that a metaethical theory is neutral instantly raises a question: neutral towards what? In this chapter, I will look at two arguments which answer this question. First I will explain and argue against David Enoch's (2013) account of metaethical neutrality and his subsequent claim that certain metaethical theories – quasi-realism included – lead to an unsavoury moral verdict. I will then look at Dworkin's (1996) account of metaethical neutrality. On his account quasi-realism collapses into itself, leaving no gap between it and our first order theories of morality. Metaethical neutrality, broadly speaking, is a concern that a metaethical theory, which is intended to be separate from the theories it explains, is actually explicitly linked with those theories. Whereas Enoch's neutrality argument is focused on the influence of metaethics on ethics, Dworkin's view focuses on whether there is a distinction between metaethics and ethics at all. Enoch's argument highlights how metaethical premises can be used in an argument to generate a moral conclusion. He claims that if this is possible, then any theory that has this consequence loses its claim to neutrality. Dworkin, on the other hand, argues that there is no difference between metaethics and ethics, and if this is the case there is no such thing as a morally neutral metaethical position. If this is the case, then, Dworkin's claims, the quasi-realist has nothing to

be a projectivist- expressivist about. Dworkin's argument creates a challenge not only for the quasi-realist but also for some of the responses to Enoch's argument. Due to this I will split the chapter into two parts. First I will consider Enoch's account, the replies to it, and my own ideal quasi-realist solution. Then I will turn to Dworkin's argument and suggest how one might respond to it.

Above we saw that Enoch's account of metaethical neutrality focuses on influence; namely, a suggested influence between one discourse and another (2011, p. 41). But this idea, so far, is vague. We need to do a little work to see what one might mean by influence between discourses. The richly detailed account Enoch offers – which he draws from Hartry Field's (1980) account of the influence between fictionalism about mathematics and the practise of mathematics - provides a clear way to understand the influence of one discourse on another.

Enoch claims that one might think an obvious and straightforward neutrality violation would occur when a valid argument consisting in a discourse 1 premises leads to a discourse 2 conclusion (2011, p. 41). In other words, it would appear to be a violation of metaethical neutrality if an argument with metaethical premises yielded a moral conclusion. Enoch, however, is not satisfied with this account of metaethical neutrality. He claims that influence between discourses in the sense above is both too strong a criterion and too weak (2011, p. 41). It is too strong because it fails to capture an important intuition about metaethical neutrality; that there is only a violation of metaethical neutrality when there is some *influence* between the discourses. That is, for the influence of one discourse on another to be salient the former has to change the latter; either it adds something new, or the former discourse determines whether the other is correct. It may be necessary for the violation of metaethical neutrality that metaethical premises yield a moral conclusion, but it is not sufficient.

It follows, Enoch writes, from Field's theory that numbers are not real, but this is, he claims, all that follows. Nothing that should bother the mathematician arises; that is, the mathematician need not worry that she should stop or alter her practise of mathematics in light of Field's error theory, she can go on as before (Enoch, 2013, p. 41). One may respond that there are first order implications if error theory about mathematics is true, but this is not something Enoch would deny. Instead, he wishes to make a distinction between discriminating implications and non-discriminating implications (2011, p. 41).

This distinction is tantamount to explaining what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for influence of one discourse over another. Enoch claims that an error theory about mathematics "cannot, for instance, settle any number theoretic disputes" (2011, p. 41). He continues "and while the relevant error theory does say that the number story is a fiction, it has no implications within that fiction" (2011, p. 41). The upshot of Enoch's claim is that when the distinction is applied to metaethics, not just any influence will do, only his strong influence criterion will suffice. For the influence of metaethical neutrality to be discriminating it would have to be integral to the moral conclusion of an argument. If it were, then it would be equivalent to the mathematical case of settling "any number theoretic disputes" (2011, p. 41).

If there is no relevant influence on the first order discourse, then an error theory about said discourse does not affect the practise. In this sense, Enoch claims, an error theory about mathematics is neutral towards the first order mathematical discourse. He cashes out his claim in terms of conservative extension; one discourse conservatively extending another. For Enoch, a theory (T1) conservatively extends another (T2) if and only if:

"... all the theorems of T2 are also theorems in the extended theory (T2 & T1), and all of the theorems of (T2 & T1) that are stated purely in T2-terms are also theorems

of T2. Intuitively, while a conservative extension allows to prove more theorems in the extended language, it does not allow to prove more theorems in the original, non-extended language” (2011, p. 44).

Enoch explains the above in terms of mathematical discourse and physics discourse. If we say mathematics conservatively extends physics we mean that even though we may use a combined mathematical and physics language, the original phenomena can still be explained in terms of physics alone. The mathematics, in other words, does not add anything over and above what the language of physics offers when describing physical results. Enoch’s point is that we learn nothing new from the mathematical discourse that we couldn’t have gleaned from the language of physics (2011, 44).

Enoch generalises conservative extension to ‘provability to good arguments’ in order to apply conservative extension to moral discourse and metaethics:

“We then get that D1 conservatively extends D2 if and only if any D2 proposition is supported (to the same degree) by a good argument in the extended (D2 & D1), and any purely D2- proposition that is supported by a good argument in the extended (D2 & D1) is already supported (to the same degree) by a good argument in the original D2, so that the support it gets in the non-extended language does not add anything to the support it already has in the non-extended language” (2011, p. 44).

Enoch focuses on the second conjunct where the conservative extension of metaethics is determined by whether it adds any additional support over and above what the ethical language can provide (2011, 46). If it can be shown that metaethics is offering something extra in a good argument to support the conclusion, then metaethics is not neutral in respect to that conclusion.

What Enoch has to do, then, is to show that a metaethical premise offers more support there would otherwise be for a moral conclusion had it not been there (say, if the argument had been constructed from purely moral premises) (2011, p. 46).

Enoch considers the objection that this view of neutrality trivialises it; even factual premises can be not morally neutral (2011, p. 47). If even factual discourses look like they are morally relevant and so not morally neutral (2011, p. 47), then it is unclear what metaethical neutrality is. Enoch, however, is quite happy to agree that factual discourse can be morally relevant, “but this is not the kind of relevance needed for neutrality, for this kind of relevance is too contingent” (2011, p. 47). For example, if Jamie promised to bake you a cake if there was flour in the kitchen, then there being flour in the kitchen becomes morally relevant (2011, p. 47 – 48). The relevance, Enoch claims, must be non-contingent. So, for example, the relevance cannot be something like the content of a promise; the connection must be a morally necessary one, or an internal connection (2011, p. 48).

For Enoch the promise to bake a cake would be a contingent relevance because it is Jamie’s promise which makes the fact - there was flour in the kitchen - morally relevant. Take away the promise and you take away the moral relevance. In contrast, a non-contingent connection is a necessary one, it is immune to counterfactuals in the way the baking the cake example was not. (Should Jamie not promise, then there being flour in the kitchen is not morally relevant.) Enoch writes “The intuitive idea in the dispute between those taking metaethics to be morally neutral and those denying this neutrality is about the internal connections, as it were, between metaethics and morality, or some non-contingent, at least morally necessary connections of this sort” (2011, p. 48). Enoch now needs to show that such an argument can be made. Next we will turn to his characterised subjectivist argument which is intended to show that there is a non-contingent connection between metaethics and morality.

## **Enoch's Argument: Preferences vs Facts**

Enoch begins by discussing preference based disagreements in order to contrast them with factual disagreements. Factual disagreements, Enoch claims, are much more like moral disagreements. We'll see why he thinks this in a moment. Let us take an example of a preference based disagreement from Enoch. Suppose Alice and Bob are disagreeing over what to do today. Bob wants to go to see a movie and Alice wants to play tennis. The right thing for Bob and Alice to do in this situation is to take an impartial view over what they should do. Enoch defines IMPARTIALITY as the following:

“IMPATIALITY: In an interpersonal conflict, we should step back from our mere preferences, or feelings, or attitudes, or some such, and to the extent the conflict is due to those, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for. Furthermore, each party to the conflict should acknowledge as much: standing ones ground is, in such cases, morally wrong” (2011, 19)

Given IMPARTIALITY it would be morally wrong for Bob or Alice to insist that they do x due to a preference to do x. It would be morally wrong for Bob or Alice to stand their ground because all preferences, Enoch claims, because Alice and Bob have equal moral status and thus their preferences should be considered to be equal (2011, 18). Given this, if Bob did stand his ground he would be assuming his preference is more important than Alice's (2011, 18). And so Bob would be disregarding Alice's equal moral worth. Let us compare the preference case to the factual case.



Suppose Bob and Alice agree to go to the cinema, but they disagree about the fastest way to get there.<sup>38</sup> Bob thinks the fastest way will be taking the train, whereas Alice thinks the fastest way will be to take the bus. There is a fact about the matter, but there are other considerations at play. Bob and Alice might, for example, think they are epistemic peers in this case; there is no reason to doubt that Bob knows better than Alice and vice versa (2011, 21). Judging one another to be epistemic peers, Enoch writes, might yield an impartial decision. There is also a practical issue; Bob disagreeing with Alice might hurt her feelings and so an impartial view might be sought (2011, p. 21).

It is these considerations, Enoch points out, that generate the IMPARTIALITY verdict in the factual disagreement. If we remove what Enoch calls “other considerations” and view the factual disagreement as all things being considered equal then we get a different verdict; standing ones ground. Enoch claims that IMPARTIALITY only holds in this case due to other factors that are side features of the factual disagreement. The upshot of the claim that other considerations yield IMPARTIALITY is that the factual disagreement considered on its own would not result in IMPARTIALITY.

Enoch claims that IMPARTIALITY holds in the case above because of the other considerations and because the choices being made are about something which doesn’t really matter (2011, p. 21). On a more serious case, however, even the other considerations would be overridden, which would result in a stand your ground verdict. Suppose Alice and Bob both need to defuse a bomb but they disagree on which wire to cut.<sup>39</sup> Alice thinks she should cut the red wire. Bob thinks he should cut the blue wire. In this example, Bob happens to be right, he should cut the blue wire and he is justified in thinking so. It would be rational for him to cut the blue wire. Enoch claims

<sup>38</sup> This example is taken from Enoch (2011, p. 21) – I have changed the mode of transport, and introduced character names to make the example clearer.

<sup>39</sup> This example is also taken from Enoch (2011, 21) – I have added character names for clarity.

that because the reason for Bob cutting the blue wire is important IMPARTIALITY is overridden (2011, p. 21-22). He makes the crucial distinction between the preference case and the factual case in terms of an indexical. Enoch writes “things would have been different if my reason for the relevant action – for instance, for cutting the blue wire – *was that I believe that cutting it will neutralize the bomb* [...] but my reason for cutting the blue wire is not the *indexical that I believe that cutting it will neutralize the bomb*; rather, my reason is *that cutting it will neutralize the bomb* (as I believe)” (2011, p. 22).<sup>40</sup> Here we get to the crux of Enoch’s argument, it hangs, not on truth, but on mind-independence (as Enoch rightly points out later in the chapter).

The reason IMPARTIALITY is not generated for the bomb case is because Bob’s view is not grounded in the fact that he believes cutting the blue wire is the right thing to do, but because there is a right thing to do – a fact of the matter – and he believes that the fact of the matter is the right thing to do. In other words, the fact that cutting the blue wire is the correct option is not a fact in virtue of anything to do with Bob. If Bob had a different belief – that cutting the red wire was correct – the fact that the blue wire was the correct choice would not change.

The mind-dependence in the bomb case, then, is contrasted with the preference case where it is because of something about myself that I have a preference to do x. This is, for Enoch, fundamentally why my preferences can’t trump yours: they are all on an equal footing because there is nothing external to either of us which offers more authority to one preference over another. Crucially, then, Enoch holds the following premise:

AUTHORITY: Only something external to my own attitudes can yield authority in interpersonal disagreements.

<sup>40</sup> My italics.

If we were to accept AUTHORITY, then preferences are not authoritative enough to offer the correct verdict because their authority is mind-dependent. Although it is correct that Enoch holds mind-independence to be crucial for moral disagreement, it is the particular type of AUTHORITY which Enoch regards as salient which is at issue. As we'll see in both Sinclair's (Sinclair, 2014a), and Manne and Sobel's (Manne and Sobel, 2014) replies to Enoch they take issue with Enoch's characterisation of AUTHORITY. Both consider the reply to Enoch that attitudes or preferences can have a degree of "pedigree", a notion which Enoch admits he did not fully consider in his original paper (Enoch, 2014, p. 855). Before we look at the replies and Enoch's response, let us explore Enoch's argument in detail.

### **Enoch's Argument: Moral Disagreement**

First, we must look at the moral disagreement case and see how it matches up with a case of factual disagreement. Suppose that Bob and Alice, for some terrible reason, must decide about whether to cause a dog some pain.<sup>41</sup> Bob thinks it is not morally wrong to cause the dog pain. He understands that the dog can feel pain, but does not take its pain to be morally relevant. Alice, on the other hand, does think it is wrong to cause dogs pain, and she does take the pain of the dog to be morally relevant. Enoch claims that if Alice is epistemically justified, then she is justified in standing her ground (2011, p. 23). Enoch thinks this is a case which rings true for our intuitions; there are moral disagreement cases where the morally right thing to do is to stand one's ground. And here's the rub for the expressivist. There are cases of moral disagreement when it is right to stand one's ground, but expressivism, according to Enoch, doesn't allow for a standing one's ground conclusion. If we follow expressivism, Enoch claims, then we always end

<sup>41</sup> Again, this example is Enoch's (2011, 23 – 24) but I've added character names for ease of reading.

up with an impartial view due to, ultimately, the expressivist picture being one that relies on ourselves for our moral verdicts. Before Enoch discusses the problem as it is applied to expressivism he sets out his argument against what he calls “Characterized Subjectivism”. On his view we can define characterised subjectivism as follows:

Caricaturised Subjectivism: “Moral judgements report simple preferences, ones that are exactly on a par with a preference for playing tennis or for catching a movie” (2011, p. 25)

Enoch gives a reductio argument:

- “1. Caricaturised Subjectivism. (For Reductio)
2. If Caricaturised Subjectivism is true, then interpersonal conflicts due to moral disagreements are really just interpersonal conflicts due to differences in mere preferences. (From the content of Caricaturised Subjectivism).
3. Therefore, interpersonal conflicts due to moral disagreement are just interpersonal conflicts due to the differences in mere preferences. (From 1 and 2.)
4. IMPARTIALITY, that is, roughly: when an interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) is a matter merely of preferences, then an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for, and it is wrong to just stand one’s ground.
5. Therefore, in cases of interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) due to moral disagreement, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for, and it is wrong to just stand one’s ground) (From 3 and 4)
6. However, in cases of interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) due to moral disagreement often an impartial solution is not called for, and it is permissible, and even required, to stand one’s ground.
7. Therefore, Caricaturised Subjectivism is false.” (2011, p. 25-26)

Enoch admits no one really *is* a Caricaturized Subjectivist, but he believes he can generalise the argument against the Caricaturized Subjectivist to the quasi-realist. And so one way to block Enoch's argument is to argue that such a generalisation cannot happen. Manne and Sobel (2013) take this as one of their strategies and I will discuss their response at length in section four.

### **Enoch's Argument Generalised to Quasi-Realism**

Enoch notes that quasi-realism is importantly not a response dependent theory, but he attempts to make the case that nevertheless quasi-realism has the right level of mind-dependence for his argument to go through. He writes that the quasi-realist "still has to believe that morality somehow depends on us, that the ultimate explanation of why it is that certain moral claims are true has something to do with us and our feelings and attitudes" (2011, p. 36). For the quasi-realist to have a unique metaethical theory she must, Enoch claims, retain her projectivism. If projectivism is doing all of the work, and if projectivism is a dependency thesis of the sort needed for his argument, then quasi-realism will also be subject to the IMPARTIALITY argument.

Enoch claims that explanatory priority (2011, p. 37) allows him to apply his argument to Blackburn's quasi-realism, he makes use of the following quotation from Blackburn to illustrate his point:

"But sure we do have a serviceable way of describing the [realist-antirealist] debate, at least as far as it concerns evaluation and morals. It is about explanation. The projectivist holds that our nature as moralists is well explained by regarding us as reacting to a reality which contains nothing in the way of values, duties, rights, and

so forth; a realist thinks it is well explained only by seeing us as able to perceive, cognize, intuit, an independent moral reality. He holds that the moral features of things are the parents of our sentiments, whereas the Humean holds that they are their children” (Blackburn, 1981, p. 164-5)

For Enoch, the dependency of the quasi-realist is one of “explanatory priority”. The explanatory priority of the quasi-realist is one in which it is not the world that grounds our morality, but ourselves. And Enoch thinks it results in Blackburn being committed to “a contingency of moral truths” (2011, p. 37).

One may argue against the contingency of truths claim that Enoch puts forward. We’ll see in section five which deals with Sinclair’s reply how an expressivist might argue that Enoch’s claim is a misunderstanding of how counterfactuals work on Blackburn’s account. The expressivist can simply block Enoch’s argument by looking closely at Blackburn’s argument for mind-independence in *Spreading the Word*. Enoch claims, however, that his argument goes through even if the counterfactual claim does not ring true. All that is needed, Enoch claims, is the explanatory priority. If quasi-realists are committed to the claim that our values in some sense depend on ourselves, then they will fall foul of Enoch’s argument. In other words, if there really is an explanatory priority in Blackburn’s quasi-realism, then Enoch thinks this equates to there being enough mind-dependence for his argument to follow.

One key problem of the characterised subjectivist argument above is the justificatory implication hiding behind the reductio. Enoch’s view is that it is the subjectivism that is determining whether or not I should stand my ground, and not the ethical theory which my subjectivism explains. As we saw, IMPARTIALITY is generated by Alice and Bob both having different preferences. The

only guiding moral principle in the scenario is IMPARTIALITY itself. It seems, then, that if the preferences generate IMPARTIALITY, then preferences are the central moral feature in the scenario. That is, it is only the preferences, according to Enoch, which generate the moral principle of IMPARTIALITY, so preferences are (morally speaking) prior to the principle of IMPARTIALITY. One might say, however, that it is not only the preferences but the equality between those preferences which are generating IMPARTIALITY. This is true, but it does not yet help the quasi-realist. What she needs to show is that the preferences can't be viewed as equal to one another. If she can do this, she will block IMPARTIALITY.

Moral disagreement, however, is disagreement about what to do in certain ethical cases. When you're asked what you should do about, say, the dog pain case, you may well give some ethical reasons based on your ethics. Perhaps you think causing dogs pain is morally relevant. You think dogs being in pain is morally relevant because what is morally relevant for you is equal consideration of interests animals have in not suffering (Singer, 1993).

One line of defence for the expressivist is to go down this route and claim that what decides whether you will cause dogs pain or not is moral relevance, and moral relevance is grounded in your first order moral beliefs. One does not cite a metaethical system to justify a moral action or judgement. When someone insists that "you should do x" and you ask them why you should x, they don't then utter "because you are expressing an attitude" – this would be the wrong answer, because metaethics is explanatory, not justificatory. And it is this crucial difference between ethics and metaethics which makes sense of the distinction between the two.

Enoch might argue (as he does against one of the replies Manne and Sobel offer) (Manne and Sobel, 2014) that his argument is all things considered. The system of ethics accepted by two people in disagreement isn't morally relevant because Enoch has already classified it as part of

the type of consideration we are ignoring. But this reply has a problem. It is not clear why we would allow for IMPARTIALITY as a moral principle to be involved in moral disagreements but no other moral considerations that are held by Bob and Alice (respectively). In other words, it is not clear why Alice and Bob would allow IMPARTIALITY to determine what they ought to do without allowing for any first order moral principles they may hold. What to do is determined by the moral principles, not what is expressed by those principles. Enoch may reply and claim that his characterised subjectivist example shows that a moral verdict relies on a metaethical premise. But IMPARTIALITY itself is not only a moral principle, but a metaethical one too. Enoch's IMPARTIALITY links metaethics and ethics together. It is this link which makes Enoch's conclusion read plausibly, but he needs to argue for why we should accept the two claims that make up IMPARTIALITY. The claims are as follows:

1. The metaethical premise: that when we express a normative judgement we express a preference.
2. The Moral Premise: that we all have equal moral status.

Together, both claims lead to 3. When we express equal preferences, we should proceed impartially. What is going on here, I will argue, is a hidden assumption that the first metaethical premise is justificatory in some sense. And it is this justificatory reading of the premise that makes 3 plausible. The quasi-realist should reject the justificatory reading.

Enoch requires the justificatory implication in his argument. If we dismantle the justificatory implication; that is, if we show how a metaethical theory can be explanatory but in no way concerned with justification, then the quasi-realist can side-step Enoch's challenge entirely. Enoch fails to offer a satisfactory argument for why such an explanatory



priority leads to an application of IMPARTIALITY. The priority alone, even if we grant it, is not enough to generate what Enoch wants it to. Let us see – in order to be as charitable as possible - if we can construct an argument to see how Enoch might attempt to get from explanatory priority to IMPARTIALITY.

Enoch claims that the quasi-realist must say that the fundamental explanation for our morality is our attitudes (2011, p. 37). Even if she is not concerned with offering truth conditions in terms of those attitudes, and even if - as we'll see in Sinclair's response – expressivists claim that they not explaining but offering more moral verdicts - Blackburn's quasi-realist expressivism is attitudes all the way down. Enoch claims that even with the core expressivist manoeuvre in place: the quasi-realist's change of question from 'what is x' to 'what are we doing when we voice x', the quasi-realist is still, at its foundation, concerned with attitudes. This is what, Enoch writes, makes quasi-realism a distinctive metaethical theory (2011, p. 37). The quasi-realist must cite attitudes as fundamentally explanatory to remain metaethically unique; so she can't remove this explanation without cost. The explanatory priority, however, has dire costs of its own. Enoch's argument seems to take the following form:

1. Quasi-realism
2. For the quasi-realist, attitudes ground our morality.
3. For the quasi-realist, there is nothing more to morality than our attitudes.
4. If there is nothing more to morality than our attitudes, then there is no authority other than ourselves.
5. If there is no authority other than ourselves, then our moral preferences are just like our preferences for anything else.

6. We have equal moral status.
7. If there is no authority other than ourselves, and we have equal moral status, then our attitudes are all on equal footing.
8. IMPARTIALITY; if our attitudes are on an equal footing, then we must proceed by treating all relevant attitudes impartially.
9. If our attitudes are all on equal footing, then IMPARTIALITY applies.
10. If IMPARTIALITY applies, then quasi-realism doesn't capture an important part of our moral discourse: standing one's ground.
11. IMPARTIALITY applies
12. Quasi-realism doesn't capture a piece of moral discourse
13. Quasi-realism is false.

We wanted to see how Enoch argued for IMPARTIALITY from a moral premise (equal moral status) and a metaethical one (that moral judgements are preferences akin to preferences for playing tennis). From the above IMPARTIALITY is established due to an AUTHORITY assumption:

AUTHORITY: the assumption that unless my judgements are rooted in something non-dependent on me, there can be no mind-independence.

Hence, Enoch's focus on explanatory priority, he thinks this shows that preferences do not have the requisite AUTHORITY to block IMPARTIALITY. The expressivist, however, doesn't have to accept the authority claim doing so much work in premises 4, 5, and 6. She can reject premise

4. One way for the expressivist to reply to Enoch (as Enoch himself suggests) is to argue that preferences are normatively special in some way. He briefly considers this sort of response at the end of his section on Blackburn. He writes:

“And the expressivist can further insist that the classification of responses as special (or as non-special) is itself a normative matter, about which her expressivism implies nothing one way of another, so that she can join this part of the normative discussion with the rest of us. And here too this would show that my argument does not amount to a refutation of expressivism. But here too expressivism will be losing plausibility points, as it cannot explain this distinction among our relevant responses, and so stands at an explanatory disadvantage compared to more objective views” (2011, p. 38).

We will look at this strategy for the expressivist in the section on Sinclair’s (2014) reply. For now, however I want to press an assumption behind Enoch’s objection to that strategy above. Enoch claims that if the expressivist claims that the debate over moral judgements is a normative matter, then this response renders expressivism less plausible because it can’t explain the intuitive difference between a preference for playing tennis, and a preference for not kicking dogs. One tactic we will explore in section seven is how the expressivist can say there is a difference between the two types of preference. I will return to this reply later in the chapter when I come to discuss Sinclair’s reply (Sinclair, 2014a). For now, let us consider a different way to object to Enoch’s argument.

We saw above that Enoch holds the AUTHORITY assumption; mind independence is crucial to whatever grounds a moral judgment. Enoch’s project is split between – on the one hand – the claim that quasi-realism, as an explanatory programme, is mind-dependent enough to generate IMPARTIALITY. And on the other, the claim that it was unclear how one got to the IMPARTIALITY conclusion from the claim that quasi-realism was mind-dependent (although as we shall see, it is not). Why should IMPARTIALITY follow from

the claim that all people have equal moral status, and the metaethical claim that moral judgements amount to preferences? The reason is due to AUTHORITY: Enoch mistakenly views quasi-realism as a justificatory programme for first order ethics, and not simply an explanatory one.

Let us look the dog pain case once more to understand this point in more detail. Suppose we have Bob and Alice in a situation where unfortunately, once again, they must decide on whether they should cause pain to a dog. Like before, Alice thinks the dog's pain is morally relevant, and Bob thinks it is not. Bob might well ask Alice why she thinks the pain of the dog is morally relevant. Intuitively, in a moral disagreement, Ali we would imagine that Alice will cite moral reasons. What she won't do is cite a metaethical theory, or a metaethical understanding of the judgement she expresses, because it doesn't provide what Bob is asking for.

Consider the following:

### **1. Ethical Justification**

Bob: "Why do you think the pain of dogs is morally relevant?"

Alice: "Because according to my Utilitarian view the dog has an interest in not suffering and this matters"

Bob "Why?"

Alice: - Alice cites further information on Utilitarian reasoning -

Or

### **2. Metaethical Justification (a)**

Bob: “Why do you think the pain of dogs is morally relevant?”

Alice: “I have a preference for dogs not to be harmed”

Bob: Why?

Or

### **3. Metaethical Justification (b)**

Bob: “Why do you think the pain of dogs is morally relevant?”

Alice: “It is a moral fact that the pain of dogs is morally relevant”

Bob: Why?

As we can see in metaethical justifications (a) and (b), they don’t seem to answer the question in the way Bob intended. Bob wants to know about moral relevance, which implies he wants to know more about Alice’s ethics. If Bob presses Alice as he does in (3), Alice’s answer to her claim about moral facts might elaborate on her metaethical views. But this would not tell us more about her answer to the first question, it would not tell us why we should consider the pain of dogs morally relevant, it would simply result in a metaethical debate.

How does the justificatory reading come from the AUTHORITY assumption? By taking preferences to hold no mind-independent authority it sounds plausible to step back from those preferences and proceed collectively. There is nothing to sway you from doing otherwise, if a rope is being pulled with equal strength in both directions, then both of you have an equal say in the direction the rope goes in.

If, however, one of the people pulling the rope did have more strength, this would sway the direction the rope went in. If, like Enoch, we take truth or facts to have bearing on what we ought to do, then the truth or facts also inform our actions. Enoch takes it that only something like moral facts can have this direction pulling feature, and so in such cases IMPARTIALITY would not apply. The authority (or lack of authority) of whatever grounds our moral judgements, for Enoch, rationally leads to either impartiality or standing one's ground. But the AUTHORITY claim is a metaethical one, and if it can be challenged it is no longer clear why IMPARTIALITY would hold for the quasi-realist.

One might wonder where the ethics has gone, if it turns out Enoch's justification for impartiality is not a moral one. The ethical justification lies in the start of the argument; the assumption that expressing preferences, rather than the content of those preferences, informs our moral choices and action. One might think it is rational to be impartial given the actual preferences of Alice and Bob, but this doesn't mean that preferences wholesale result in impartiality. To assume the second claim is to assume that the expression of preferences have a direct moral result: impartiality. Enoch is trading on the plausibility of the first intuition to deliver the plausibility of the second.

### **Conceding One's Ground**

In the literature on whether expressivism can accommodate the notion that one should stand one's ground (Enoch, 2011 and 2013, Manne and Sobel, 2013, Sinclair, 2014) the discussion has so far focused on disagreement between two participants, one of which should stand their ground. I want to consider another phenomenon that the expressivist must accommodate; moral disagreements when it is right to concede. After all, it is not always the case that one should stand one's ground simply because one is engaged in a moral disagreement. I will argue that

there has, so far in the literature, been acceptance of a distinction which the debate has relied on. That standing one's ground and impartiality are fundamentally separate notions, or at least they remain distinct when we are concerned with attitude-based disagreements.

I will use this flipping of Enoch's question to show how standing one's ground includes an important sense of impartiality, one that is used in (at the very least, the version of quasi-realism I advance). And so, one no longer has a clear-cut verdict that one should stand one's ground in the sense that Enoch puts forward, because a crucial notion of standing one's ground includes impartiality.

### **What is Conceding One's Ground?**

Like Enoch I am going to start by proposing a moral principle, one that I will claim is part of our ordinary moral discourse and so something which must be explained by the quasi-realist:

CONCEDING: In moral disagreements conceding to another person's judgement can be the right thing to do.

Conceding is complimentary to the standing one's ground case. If, during a moral disagreement, one person stands their ground and course of action *x* is taken, then the other person must concede their ground. Bob who stands his ground does so due to being more justified in his belief *x*. Alice, who concedes, recognises after some disagreement, that Bob is more justified in his belief *x*. it would be wrong for Alice to stand her ground in this case.

Enoch discusses Bob's side of the disagreement. It would be right for Bob to stand his ground and it would be wrong for him to be impartial (we will, for the sake of argument, agree to this

way of thinking about the matter). On Alice's side of the disagreement, it would be wrong for her to stand her ground, but if she concedes to Bob she is not being impartial. At least, not given the way impartiality is separated from standing one's ground on Enoch's view. It, at least *prima facie*, does not seem to be impartial for Alice to agree with Bob after disagreeing with him.

Instead it seems like she has agreed with Bob, in other words, she has conceded her view. And conceding her view and agreeing with Bob was the right thing to do in this case. We will, for the sake of argument, assume that conceding one's ground, where appropriate, amounts to a moral principle; it is the right thing to do in some moral disagreements.

Why might it be right for Alice to give her view up and take Bob's view on as her own. Suppose that Alice, after some intense debate, found that her view was based on a false empirical premise. Bob educated her about the facts of the matter and she realised it would be correct for her to concede. This seems like a case of moral disagreement, in which there is a right answer, where someone has used impartiality; a stepping back to assess attitudes, to come to the right moral conclusion. But this is not IMPARTIALITY as Enoch would have it, where stepping back from a judgement renders them both equal. Rather, we can conceive of Alice and Bob as both stepping back from their judgements; reflecting, reassessing, conceding or standing their ground based on momentarily acting impartial.

The conceding case illuminates something useful for us; it was the right thing to be impartial for Alice. And so, at least in these cases impartiality is the right moral verdict. How about the standing one's ground cases. Here I want to argue that standing one's ground is rooted in impartiality, and in fact it is impartiality that gives a moral verdict its moral clout.



When we think about impartiality it is not clear that we have to think everyone's judgements are on a par. Rather, impartiality asks us to consider everyone's judgement before making a decision. It asks us to give everyone's judgements equal consideration, not equal status. Let me explain. Suppose Alice and Bob are joined by Bertie and Wooster. They all witness a moral event and think that something should be done in response to it as a group (imagine only a group response will suffice). Alice, thinks they should do y. Bob thinks they should do x. Bertie thinks they should do z, and Wooster thinks they should do c. We assume, as Enoch does, that all of our participants are morally equal. They also know need to decide which course of action to take. Suppose also that some form of impartiality is the best way for the group to decide what to do. Impartiality, I've said, is an equal consideration of judgements. In addition, we accept that everyone has equal moral status. What is the outcome? Well, we might end up with something like Enoch's argument if we accept that impartiality is a moral principle. Instead, if we consider impartiality to be first and foremost a principle of practical reason that we use as an aid in moral thinking, then we can adjust what we mean by impartiality a little to reflect this. For example, one might suggest that impartiality is only the initial, not continuous consideration of judgements.

If impartiality is only initial, then it also has the power to be discriminating. For example, imagine that our group are deciding what to eat. Alice wants to eat bread. Bob wants to eat pizza. Bertie wants to eat ice-cream, and Wooster wants a piece of paper. They can only, for the sake of the example, eat one thing. So they must come to some agreement and so they consider everyone's judgements with equal consideration. Wooster's judgement, that he needs a piece of paper, is clearly out of line with what the rest of the group thinks. Something has gone wrong with his reasoning. Although the group started out by considering everyone's judgements on a par (there was no automatic shift to just do whatever Bob wants) it is clear that they would rule out Wooster's judgement without breaking impartiality because Wooster's judgement was based on

faulty thinking. We also find Alice's judgement to be faulty; the bread is mouldy and she didn't know when she expressed her first judgement. Bertie's want for ice-cream turns out to not be an option because there is no ice-cream available for miles around. The only option left is Bob's choice: pizza.

The above is a demonstration of impartiality as a rational procedure (which you would use in all domains of discourse) rather than a moral principle. If it's a rational procedure, then an initial consideration of judgements is impartial enough, and sound reasoning does the rest of the work to see if one should remain impartial.

The above ties in to general projectivist thinking that our knowledge of the world; our empirical knowledge, can inform and change our attitudes to it. So, if we combine the notion of impartiality in deliberation above in the moral case. Then one can be impartial and concede based on the descriptive errors alone. Of course, the argument above accepts Enoch's premise about preferences being at least initially on a par, but this is a premise the quasi-realist is keen to reject. Below we'll see how Manne and Sobel develop the above impartiality claim by suggesting that if some preferences are more informed by others, then IMPARTIALITY does not hold.

### **Manne and Sobel: Reply to Enoch**

Manne and Sobel approach Enoch's argument with two different strategies. First, they argue that Enoch gets the intuitive idea about the phenomena he is trying to explain right (disputes over coordination), but that Enoch does not offer enough support for his generalisation to wider phenomena. Second, they argue that Enoch gets the phenomena itself wrong; it is not

coordination and disputes about coordination that we are concerned with. Manne and Sobel (Manne and Sobel, 2014) begin by focusing on a particular claim; the claim that there is an asymmetry between factual and moral disputes for a particular type of anti-realist (2014, p. 824).

There are, they argue, other ways to make sense of the intuitions Enoch employs to support his asymmetry claim. The claim that preference-based disputes would lead to IMPARTIALITY is dubious. Manne and Sobel offer the example of Alice who has two good watches, and Bob who has none. Bob wanting one of Alice's watches does not lead to an IMPARTIALITY result where she gives Bob one of her watches (2014, p. 825).

Enoch might deal with this type of case, Manne and Sobel suggest, by either making it clear that his argument is only regarding disputes when coordination is called for. This would dismiss the watch case as a problem, since neither Alice nor Bob wish to coordinate on the matter. It is only for a certain type of preference dispute – where cases of coordination are called for – and where the IMPARTIALITY verdict seems intuitively correct (Manne and Sobel, 2014, p. 826). If this is the case, then Enoch's claim that moral disputes are more like factual disputes doesn't seem as strong.

As Manne and Sobel argue, if we take Enoch to be only be discussing a narrow type of dispute where coordination is called for, then it seems too much of a jump to then conclude that moral disputes are like factual disputes, since it has not been established that all, but merely some, moral disputes are like factual disputes (2014, p. 826). His second option for dealing with the watch case is to "say that there is universally such pressure in preference dispute cases, but sometimes stronger rival normative forces mask this extant pressure" (Manne and Sobel, 2014, p. 825).

Both responses, they claim, are unsatisfactory. The two options above can be seen in terms of whether there is a universal or a narrow pressure to IMPARTIALITY. On the former, there is only a narrow pressure for cases involving coordination, on the latter there is a universal pressure but other normative features of the dispute block IMPARTIALITY (2014, p. 825). The problem, Manne and Sobel claim, is that “what we so far lack is a reason to think that moral disputes (or, perhaps the subset of moral disputes in which standing one’s ground is appropriate) are more like factual disputes than they are like preference disputes where coordination is not called for” (2014, p. 826). Their worry is that it might only be our desire for coordination that is supporting Enoch’s intuition, rather than a reason for it (2013, p. 826).

What Enoch needs to do, Manne and Sobel write, is to show why we should accept IMPARTIALITY for preferences cases, but this is something he offers no evidence for, “if I would prefer that there were more stars in the sky, and you like it as it is, then we assume we have a preference dispute. But it is hard to believe that there is pressure on agents to be impartial between their own preferences and the preferences of the person they are in a preference dispute with in cases such as this” (2013, p. 827).

One obvious reply Enoch might want to give to Manne and Sobel is to reject the set-up of the examples on offer. The stars case is not a moral case. It doesn’t matter morally whether you want more stars in the sky or not. This sort of case, then, cannot be used to drive the intuition that IMPARTIALITY would be wrongly applied here, because no one would think IMPARTIALITY need be applied here. Rather, we need a case to drive the same intuition, but which is paradigmatically moral. One such case might be one we can borrow from environmental philosophy; Rosalind Hursthouse’s notion of blowing up the moon (Walker and Ivanhoe, 2007)

Suppose Alice and Bob are discussing whether to blow up the moon. Alice prefers blowing up the moon. This would, I am assuming, cause moral outrage and not just aesthetic outrage.<sup>42</sup> Blowing up the moon, and the prospect of it, we shall say, would plausibly cause moral outrage. It would cause people to condemn it, urge against it, there might even be collective action and so on. Bob, on the other hand, has a preference not to blow up the moon. He and Alice, I take it, disagree, and they disagree in preference, and their disagreement is a moral one.<sup>43</sup> The moon example is a case of preference disagreement where IMPARTIALITY does not hold. Now, one reason why Manne and Sobel use the example they do is because it is meant to show the absurdity of the claim that there is pressure to be impartial. The problem is that Enoch needs to say where this pressure comes from, and he can't simply rely on the intuition that the pressure comes from the moral cases since 1. We have seen that in the moral moon case above no such pressure exists and 2. Claiming that the pressure comes from the moral cases assumes that the moral cases automatically resist IMPARTIALITY.

Manne and Sobel also take issue with Enoch's methodology; the preference and truth cases are too dissimilar to establish normative asymmetry (2013, p. 827). What is needed, Manne and Sobel claim, are two cases which are "as similar as possible, and then see if the asymmetry remains" (2013, p. 827). One way to make the cases more similar is to raise the "pedigree" of the preferences so that they are more on a par with the truth case/or facts.

Manne and Sobel suggest the following example: "So suppose I am in a preference dispute with someone where my preferences are significantly better informed than the other person's and in fact my preference is for what I really want, whereas the other person's preference is not" (2014,

<sup>42</sup> Although of course there is a debate here about the role of morality within aesthetics, I will not be engaging with it here because it will go beyond the scope of the chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Albeit thankfully a hypothetical one; although an interesting aspect of this example is it brings to the fore that one can become morally outraged against an imagined scenario, it need not be real for us to have a moral judgement. Something which is important for considering whether ideal advisors can really assist us in our moral thinking.

p. 828) in a case like this Manne and Sobel claim that we would not think that IMPARTIALITY holds. Rather, we would think the person with the more informed preference should hold their ground. Given this Manne and Sobel claim that there is much less asymmetry between preference and truth cases (2014, p. 828). Another problem is the preference cases being heavily saturated with a need to coordinate. They think that cooperation is essential to the preferences cases offered by Enoch; on the movie or tennis case both Alice and Bob want to spend the day together (2014, p. 828). It might be their want to spend the day together, and so their need for coordination, that might be generating a sway towards IMPARTIALITY (2014, p. 828). If this is the case, then it is not clear that it is the preferences doing the work, rather, it would be coordination (2014, p. 828).

Coordination also encourages IMPARTIALITY, “If we both think that morally speaking the most important thing is that the child be saved, and that all the morally best worlds involve the child being saved, and the child can only be saved if we make a joint decision, then again the pressure to compromise is increased” (2014, p. 828). On this example it is not the facts of the matter on how best to save the child but “which is the morally better way to do so” (2014, p. 828). For the past two cases Manne and Sobel think they have offered examples that have more in common with each other than the ones Enoch offers. They claim that on both examples the asymmetry between the preferences and factual cases are not so clear cut.

On their second strategy Manne and Sobel provide an alternative explanation for the intuitions Enoch employs in his argument. They suggest that Enoch proposes the following principle:

“DISTINCTIVE: Practical interpersonal conflicts based on moral disagreements are (at least fairly) distinctive, as compared with (with clear-cut cases of) preference-based disagreements. That is, moral disagreements tend to generate conflicts where

you should (or at least may) stand your ground, whereas preference-based conflicts tend to generate conflicts where you shouldn't stand your ground" (2013, p. 829)

Manne and Sobel suggest a rival principle:

IMPORTANT: Practical interpersonal conflicts where it is particularly important that I should get my way (rather than you getting your way) are generally ones where I should (or at least may) stand my ground-regardless of what kind of disagreement this conflict is based on" (2013, p. 830).

IMPORTANT, Manne and Sobel claim, can explain the intuitions Enoch uses but without getting the response dependent theorist or expressivist in hot water. They make use of Enoch's example to show how IMPORTANT applies better than DISTINCTIVE. Consider the following two examples:

"Afternoon Activity 1: We're spending the afternoon together. I want to go catch a movie I've been looking forward to seeing. You'd rather play tennis. But both of us really want to spend the afternoon together. How should we proceed?" (2013, p. 831).

Afternoon Activity 2: We're spending the afternoon together, doing some volunteering. I think we should, and would thus prefer to, help out at the local amateur film society. You think we should, and would thus prefer to, help out at an organisation that gives tennis lessons to troubled youths. How should we proceed?" (2013, p. 831).

On the above case Manne and Sobel claim that in both cases it would be wrong to stand one's ground. Given this intuition, IMPORTANT explains the cases well, and DISTINCTIVE does not. Recall that on DISTINCTIVE moral cases tend to result in standing one's ground, and preference cases tend to result in IMPARTIALITY. This is the normative asymmetry that Enoch is trying to capture. Manne and Sobel, however, explain that what is going on here is a matter of importance. That is, on the cases above the intuition is that we should not stand our ground in either cases because in both cases the matter is not particularly important. Without IMPORTANCE, there is nothing to merit a stand one's ground verdict. Increase the importance, and we increase the intuition that in Activity 2, one should stand one's ground (2014, p. 831).

Manne and Sobel, however, have two problems that IMPORTANT suffers from that DISTINCTIVE does not. First, IMPORTANT relies on degrees of importance. Indeed, Manne and Sobel cite this as a strength; they can accommodate increasingly serious moral cases with one principle. But it is also a weakness. As a moral principle (and I take it that it is because DISTINCTIVE, which is modelled on Enoch's IMPARTIALITY, which he considers to be a moral principle) it is unclear how one can make decisions over what is important or not.

On the DISTINCTIVE principle I know whether to stand my ground; I stand my ground if we are dealing with moral truth, I compromise if my reason for action is based on my preferences. Manne and Sobel mention Activity 2 as being an inconsequential moral disagreement, but it not clear how we know this. If in both cases I am assessing my preferences to figure out what is important (not just for me personally, but generally), then Manne and Sobel need to spell out in more detail how the mechanics of IMPORTANT work. Given that its nature is in degrees, one might claim that for any given participants some moral disagreements turn up with the wrong



verdict because neither individual recognises their preferences as important. So, it fails to capture the set of disagreements that fall under that banner.

Second, IMPORTANT might simply reintroduce the normative asymmetry elsewhere; between the minor moral disagreements and major moral disagreements. But this time it is not clear where that separation lies, nor how Manne and Sobel would explain it. For example, Manne and Sobel agree that in the major disagreement cases one should stand one's ground. Presumably one should do this because of IMPORTANCE. Equally, in the minor cases one should not stand one's ground because of IMPORTANCE. But it seems that for Alice to make this choice about whether a disagreement is IMPORTANT enough, she must also have another principle telling her how to judge the level of IMPORTANCE. If this is so, then the simplicity of IMPORTANCE is diminished. Nor, one might want to venture, does it completely capture how a disagreement between someone who views an issue as minor and someone who views an issue as major will proceed.

Manne and Sobel might object here and say that my reply above misunderstands the point they are making. What IMPORTANT is trying to capture is the intuitions of Activity 1 and Activity 2. The intuition, so they claim, is that it would be morally wrong to stand your ground in both cases because the first activity is concerned with preferences which don't require standing one's ground, and the second activity – although moral – is of minor moral concern, and so does not require standing one's ground. I agree that given the cases above IMPORTANT does fit the intuition Manne and Sobel want to capture. But the test is whether IMPORTANT can capture both minor moral disagreements, non-moral disagreements, and major moral disagreements.

Our intuitions about moral cases are precise; we tend to judge something to be morally wrong or not, minor or major. It is unclear whether IMPORTANT quite captures these aspects.

Manne and Sobel pre-empt this strategy and suggest another case:

“Shrimpy 1: Jack and Jill are a married couple, who share their evening meals. Jack and Jill have both come to the conclusion that eating shrimp is morally permissible. Jack has a strong preference for incorporating shrimp into their hitherto vegetarian diet, since he finds shrimp delicious. Jill has an equally strong preference as Jack for not incorporating shrimp into their diet, though, since she finds shrimp disgusting. How should they proceed?

Shrimpy 2: Jack and Jill are a married couple, who their evening meals. Jack and Jill both think that shrimp are delicious and nutritious Jack has a strong preference for incorporating shrimp into their hitherto vegetarian diet. Jill has an equally strong preference as Jack for not incorporating shrimp into their diet, though, since she still believes (unlike Jack) that eating shrimp is morally wrong. How should they proceed?” (2014, p. 833).

Manne and Sobel claim that our intuitions for both cases are that Jill should stand her ground and Jack should not (2014, p. 833). They think the reason for this is that “it is pretty important that we have veto power over what we eat, within reason, and not nearly so important that we get to eat anything we like” (2013, 833). Jill finding shrimp disgusting in the first case, and her finding eating shrimp to be morally wrong in the second case are both, Manne and Sobel claim, equally as compelling. Both preferences are as strong on both cases, and Manne and Sobel take the intuition to be as powerful on both cases. Enoch, however, cannot make the same claim. He would want to say that Shrimpy 2 generates a more powerful intuition than Shrimpy 1 and he is, on Manne and Sobel’s argument, wrong to think this.

I do not agree that the Shrimpy cases above support Manne and Sobel's argument. The only way to get the same verdict; that both cases contain equally as strong preferences, is to read Shrimpy 1 as a moral case. Manne and Sobel are doing just that by citing veto power above as a reason for their intuition. Veto power, however, is a moral claim. The primary reason we think Jack shouldn't incorporate shrimp into their shared diet is not because Jill finds shrimp disgusting, but because to not allow Jill to choose the food she is eating is morally wrong. Both cases, then, are moral cases, and it is on the moral features of both cases that the intuition turns. Manne and Sobel's claim that Enoch's DISTINCTIVE fails here because the claim that "Enoch's principle DISTINCTIVE, the moral rather than the more personal basis of the preference might be expected to make at least some intuitive difference" runs aground because even though the intuition may be as equally strong, that is because both cases are moral.

What Manne and Sobel are attempting to do is to show that the response dependence theorist (and by extension the expressivist) cannot be subject to either horn of Enoch's dilemma. They do not have to claim that there are a certain set of moral preferences (or special preference) (which would, according to Enoch, be objectionably ad hoc), nor do they have to accept the claim that preference based theories generate the verdict of IMPARTIALITY in all cases (2014, p. 833 – 834).

Manne and Sobel think that IMPORTANT allows them to avoid the ad hoc charge because it can show how someone with a preference based theory can still stand their ground. In addition the similarity between cases was meant to show that disagreements in preference and disagreements in morals are not as clearly cut as Enoch requires them to be. I am sympathetic to Manne and Sobel's reply but as we have seen above they have not yet satisfactorily warded off the worries of Enoch's argument. There are problems of vagueness for IMPORTANT, and the

Shrimpy case intended to show that there is not much difference between the preference case and the moral case fails.

### **Enoch's Reply to Manne and Sobel**

Recall that Manne and Sobel take two strategies in their reply to Enoch. First, they argue that the asymmetry between preference based disagreements, and factual disagreements is not so clear cut (2014). Second, they argue that even if the distinction is clear cut, it can be explained much better by their IMPORTANCE principle instead of Enoch's DISTINCTIVE principle (2014). Enoch claims that Manne and Sobel's argument that IMPARTIALITY must only apply to a limited set of cases, does not worry him. He argues that the limitation is fine, "[...] even if the asymmetry survives only in a small class of cases, it still calls for explanation. And second, if we accept asymmetry in coordination cases, the generalisation naturally suggests itself, at least absent some special story" (Enoch, 2014 p. 854).

Further, a problem with Manne and Sobel's approach is that it's perfectly plausible for Enoch to make this sort of move. Given that quasi-realist's like Blackburn (1998, 1993) and Gibbard (1990, 2003) take coordination to be central to moral discourse, it is a reasonable move to limit IMPARTIALITY to cases where coordination is required since for the expressivist moral discourse is primarily concerned with coordination. Equally, as we saw above, the limit of the cases still results in a question about the limited asymmetry.

But the reply Enoch offers here is much too narrow. For although the suggestion that the question still arises between the more limited moral preferences set and factual discourse still

arises, this turns our focus away from one of the original moves in Enoch's argument. Recall that initially Enoch made the broad comparison between regular preferences and moral preferences. Manne and Sobel argued that among these regular preferences are preferences where it wouldn't make sense to be impartial (say, for example, the watch scenario). It simply wouldn't make sense for me to choose to be impartial about whether I should give you one of my watches (Manne and Sobel, 2014).

Enoch agrees that this would be absurd and that we should disregard such cases. But originally the argument rested on a comparison between strictly non-moral preferences and moral ones. The puzzle was why we viewed the moral case as different to the tennis case (in a *prima facie* sense), the answer - an answer the quasi-realist would be especially happy to give - lies in coordination. It is the desire to coordinate which gives the disagreements their moral flavour.<sup>44</sup> It is not, then, IMPARTIALITY which is the governing moral principle in these cases, but something which comes from what Enoch discusses:

EQUALITY: in cases of moral disagreement I should treat your attitudes and my attitudes equally unless one attitude is more justified than the other.

One might object and say this doesn't differentiate the tennis and other more standard moral cases at all, instead it suggests that the tennis case is a moral case. Rather than this be an objection, however, I take this sort of reply to advance how we should think about cases like the tennis preference case. The reason it seemed to plausible to enter into an impartial way of

<sup>44</sup> I'm borrowing Blackburn's term "flavour" to describe this phenomenon.

thinking was because coordination was present. The reason it felt immoral to insist on going to see a movie rather than tennis because it was breaking an inherent principle of coordination, EQUALITY. All EQUALITY adds over and above IMPARTIALITY is a justification clause.

This is where the ideal quasi-realist can step in. She can argue that given her naturalist commitments and plus her view of what we express when voicing moral judgements she can accommodate EQUALITY. Her naturalist commitments are broad; they are roughly to not allow anything supernatural into her metaethics, and to stay in line with current scientific theories. For example, the theory of evolution is where the quasi-realist finds notion of coordination, she then develops a story of how we evolved to coordinate with each other in social groups.

The ideal quasi-realist argues that when you express a stable attitude you express approval of a match between your attitude  $x$  and Ideal You's attitude  $x$ . The ideal version of you, recall, is impartial and gives initial impartial consideration to anyone in the situation you are judging. She is also equipped with all the relevant information, knowledge of relevant background theories like the theory of evolution, and is free from bias. The judgement is stable because Ideal You sees no current improvement that could be made to your judgement. The judgement is justified because you approve of your ideal advisors attitudes, and she and your attitudes are in agreement. A preference, on the other hand, has no such match. Indeed, as we saw in the aesthetic case an impartial advisor is not needed for the preference cases.

One of Enoch's replies to Manne and Sobel admits that a notion of "pedigree" in preferences might be available to a response dependent theorist (and by extension, an expressivist), but he doubts that the notion of different degrees of pedigrees in preference are able to avoid IMPARTIALITY. Suppose Alice and Bob are in a moral disagreement, and both of their

preferences for action x (or not x) are pedigree preferences, doesn't this mean, Enoch claims, that both preferences are on a par and so there is a call for IMPARTIALITY (2014, p. 856).

Recall that Blackburn explains why the problem in terms of relativism is seen in such a negative light: "The deep problem is the suspicion that other, equally admirable sensibilities, over which I can claim no superiority of my own, lead to divergent judgements" (1984, p. 199). As Blackburn rightly mentions it was Hume who introduced this problem in his *Of the Standard of Taste*. Hume introduces the conflict between two men, a young man who has warm passions, and an older man whose passions are more moderate (Blackburn, 1984, p. 199) The young man prefers Ovid, the older man prefers Tacitus (1984, p. 200). In Blackburn's discussion he uses his older account of M\* truth which we saw in the introduction to represent the improved preferences of each men.

Recall that the older and the younger man disagree about who is best, Ovid or Tacitus. "How" Blackburn asks, "can we recover a notion of truth for either judgement?" (1984, p. 200). He writes that Hume suggests that both men are at fault for thinking only one style of genre is the best (Blackburn, 1984, p. 200). Blackburn writes that what both men should do in this instance is "transcend the tree", "evidence that there is a node itself implies that it is wrong to maintain either of the conflicting commitments. It is itself a signal that the right attitude – the truth about the relative merits of Ovid and Tacitus – is not that expressed by either of these partial perspectives" (1984, 201). Rather than struggle between both conflicting judgements, one should consider both and absorb them into one's new judgement about, in this case, whether Ovid is better or worse than Tacitus. Blackburn writes "In so far as acquaintance with another value-system makes me respect it, then it properly makes me rethink both systems, transcending the tree structure" (1984, p. 201).

The disagreement, Blackburn claims, is evidence for not yet hitting upon the truth of the matter. He writes “... as soon as *I* hold that a case begins to look as though the tree structure applies, *I* also hold that there is a truth about the subject on which the divergent attitudes are held, and, holding that, *I* would also judge that one or both of the rival sensibilities is capable of improvement, until it yields my own attitude” (1984, 200). The disagreement between the two men, Blackburn writes, is based on both claims being of equal merit (1984, 200). He writes that it is the judgement that both Ovid and Tacitus are on a par that demonstrates an error in our thinking (1994, p. 200). We only think this because “The young but able literary critic is insensitive to the virtues which appear to the older man, and which in truth result in the two writers coming out equally; similarly for the older critic” (1984, p. 200). The significance of this, Blackburn claims is that an evaluative system needs to be able to transcend what he calls “the tree structure” (1984, p. 201). That there is a disagreement is evidence that we must transcend the tree, that is, we must reject (to some extent) the disagreement before us.

Blackburn explains why we would transcend the tree. He explains it in terms of obligation, because he thinks that the relativist might claim that given expressivism we undermine our own attitudes in favour of toleration, which may weaken our obligations (1984, p. 201).

Take OA to mean “it is obligatory to do A” and  $P\sim A$  to mean “it is permissible to avoid A”

1.  $M^*_1 \rightarrow OA$
2.  $M^*_2 \rightarrow P\sim A$
3. “There is no possible improvement on either  $M^*_1$  or  $M^*_2$ ” (1984, p. 202)

On the above you can’t hold both 1 and 2, so there seems to be a disagreement. Blackburn argues that the tree structure above can be transcending via:

- (1) (3) implies that it is permissible to hold  $M^*_2$ ; this implies that it is permissible to hold that  $\sim A$  is permissible, which in turn implies that  $\sim A$  is permissible;



(2) So any view, such as  $M^*_1$  which implies the reverse, is wrong, and ipso facto capable of improvement (1984, 202)

We cannot, Blackburn argues, maintain (3) if we accept (4). And so we will transcend viewing (1) and (2) as at odds with one another and consider that one or both may be capable of improvement (1984, p. 201).

Blackburn's method of transcending the tree may be useful to us as a reply to Enoch because it caches out the problem of preferences being on a par. If we do find they are improved for each person to the highest extent, yet both of them hold different attitudes, then there must be some further improvement to make. Blackburn's account, then, acknowledges that both preferences are capable of improvement, and thus a sort of justification based on which methods of reasoning were used in the improvement. It also shows that such an answer is not ad hoc. The quasi-realist is perfectly entitled to argue that the moral attitudes we claim we express are refined and not on a par with a preference for chocolate ice cream.<sup>45</sup>

Sinclair replies by giving an account of a refined attitude. We shall turn to this next and see whether it's a worthy competitor for the idea quasi-realist.

## **Sinclair's Reply**

Sinclair offers two replies the expressivist can give against Enoch. 1. She can deny that moral truth is based on emotions/attitudes in the way Enoch requires for his argument to go through, and 2. She can argue that there is a way to make a case for the claim that moral preferences are

<sup>45</sup> For more on this refer back to The Moral Attitude Problem chapter.

not on a par with preferences to see a movie or play tennis. I will focus on Sinclair's second approach and leave the first to one side.<sup>46</sup> On this strategy Sinclair tries to make the case that the expressivist can say moral preferences are normatively special and considering their special normative status are not on a par with regular preferences. His reply is not objectionably ad hoc because it relies on a story about stable attitudes (Sinclair, 2014 p. 428). Sinclair introduces a distinction between preferences and "serious negotiating concerns" where concerns are "motivationally infused non-cognitive attitude that disposes an agent to favour certain courses of action over others" and these concerns are serious when a concern is "(i) reflectively endorses, (ii) one about which is agent is resistant to change, (iii) one the satisfaction and preservation of which is considered by the agent to be very important (measuring importance psychologically, in terms of motivational strength and pervasiveness within the agent's motivational profile" (2014, p. 428). Finally, we wish to coordinate about our serious concerns; we want other people to adopt our view and share it (2014, p. 428).

Sinclair claims that because serious negotiating concerns are psychologically important, stable, and something we wish others to adopt, we are morally permitted to stand our ground regarding them (2014, p. 428). He then offers a moral claim which I am going to call RESPECT:

RESPECT: It is permissible (in some cases) for agents to stand their ground for their serious negotiating concerns.

Sinclair acknowledges that RESPECT is a moral claim, but he considers it to be plausible because respect for serious negotiating concerns "will be an important part of what an agent

<sup>46</sup> Largely because my main focus is on the plausibility of refined attitudes.

considers to be important in life. Given this (psychological) importance, it is plausible to say that agents are (at least in some cases) permitted to stand their ground” (2014, p. 428). Sinclair claims that the mere fact of a disagreement is not enough to motivate an impartial procedure over what to do. Serious negotiating concerns are more robust than this; they require something more than someone else also having a serious negotiating concern for us to choose to proceed IMPARTIALLY.

For Sinclair, then, the permissibility of standing one’s ground is based on psychological importance (2014, p. 428). He is keen to stress that this doesn’t mean that RESPECT is grounded on a Nagelian mistake; that importance is based on it being my concern (2014, p. 429) (Nagel, 1986). The view, instead, is that if a concern is important, then it is important whosever concern it may be. Sinclair introduces an example to explain his point:

“Cry Me a River: Two nations bordered by a river, lay claim to a disputed eyot. For both the eyot is crucially important in narratives of national identity and culture. The nations need to decide which of them will have sovereignty over the eyot” (2014, p. 429)

An impartial choice, Sinclair writes, would undermine the serious concerns of both countries (2014, p. 429). Both countries think the eyot is important, so trying to decide what to do impartially undermines how important they think the eyot is (2014, p. 429). Sinclair’s assumption is that if we view something as important we should stand our ground, but it is not clear why this should be the case. Sinclair raises the point that if both countries stand their ground they may find a better solution in the future; one that is “mutually agreeable”. But if this is the reasoning then it’s not yet been established that mutually agreeable action is better, indeed it seems that if standing one own’s ground is what one must do, then mutually agreeable action might not be

possible, since engaging in a coordination would result in an undermining of how important they hold the *eyot* to be.

If we, for the moment, assume Sinclair's explanation of serious negotiating concerns justifies standing one's ground, he still has another step to take; he must show how moral attitudes are like these concerns (2014, p. 429). Sinclair employs Blackburn's account of stable attitudes to make a case for this; typically, if an attitude is stable, then we are resistant to change it and we want others to adopt our view. This view of stable attitudes, Sinclair claims, is enough to establish their similarity with serious negotiating concerns. The key notion here is the importance of the attitude to the individual. Here, like Manne and Sobel, importance is a vital feature of what is morally relevant between standing one's ground and opting for impartiality. Sinclair writes, "if so, and given the general moral truth that agents should not give up deeply held concerns lightly, it will be permissible for both parties to stand their ground" (2014, p. 430). Given the stability of our attitudes, Sinclair writes, we are able to stand our ground. If the expressivist can stand their ground, then Enoch's argument fails.

Sinclair, however has a problem, and it is one of priority. His argument rests on the psychological importance of holding a stable attitude. He went for the strategy of making moral attitudes special (and indeed, moral) due to their psychological importance rather than their normative uniqueness, because had he opted for the latter then Enoch's objection would loom large.

The expressivist cannot, Enoch argues, make use of one moral norm to explain another. But psychological importance is a curious thing indeed and one might want a more detailed explanation of the psychological importance that is doing so much work in Sinclair's argument. One way to delve into the psychological importance of a serious negotiating concern is to ask

what is it that makes them psychologically important to us. One answer, which the expressivist must avoid, is that it is that the attitude is normative, or moral. The expressivist cannot give such an answer because it is simply another way of claiming that moral attitudes are normatively special. The objector might continue that it cannot be the other way around, it cannot be: because x is important, it is moral because this makes the expressivist vulnerable to a further objection: that if I find my want for cake important enough, it becomes a moral issue. If this is the case, then morality is trivialised in an unacceptable way.

To keep us on track, let us recap where the argument is at the moment. We saw that an obvious escape route for the expressivist is to argue that not all preferences (preferences for tennis and the like, and moral preferences) are on a par. This strategy, Enoch argues, although being the route he thinks the expressivist and response dependent theorist should take, is ultimately doomed. This type of reply Enoch claims relies on the same normative difference the argument is asking the expressivist about. Enoch isn't concerned with there being a normative difference between moral discourse and non-moral discourse, what he wants to know is why we can still claim there is a normative difference if we assume all moral utterances express preferences. In other words, why should we take these preferences as normatively distinct from a preference to play tennis? The expressivist needs to give an explanation here; since quasi-realism is in the business of making sense of ordinary features of our moral discourse and this distinction is part of it she needs to supply an answer to Enoch.

Sinclair's approach is to deny that the difference is tied up in normativity. Rather, the difference between moral preferences and a wanting to play tennis preference is psychological. This is an accepted difference for some expressivists, but Sinclair's reply itself does not do much to further the plausibility of such a claim. Of course, Sinclair's reply is intended to be a refutation of a specific premise of Enoch's (or at least, a premise which Sinclair reads Enoch as having):

“(1b) If expressivism is true, then moral conflicts just are cases of interpersonal conflict based on mere preferences” (2014, p. 424)

Sinclair claims that Enoch is reading the preferences as being on a par in only a normative sense, if he wasn't, then his objection – that the expressivist cannot simply introduce one normative truth to explain another – will not land, since it would allow for other explanations for preferences not being on a par. The claim leaves itself open, then, to alternative ways to explain the difference; thus offering an explanation whilst sidestepping the problem.

As we saw above, however, it is not clear that avoiding normative uniqueness is the best tactic for the expressivist. The ideal quasi-realist offers a solution which makes normativity front and centre. But it also relies a standard for projectivist thinking: a moral sensibility. Enoch forgets that a moral sensibility is made up of both input from the world and output. We express approval, yes, but it is not directly towards the objects, like a preference. We express, on an ideal quasi-realist view approval of an agreement in attitudes between an ideal and regular version of ourselves who both (one better than the other) has access to information about the world. Blackburn, too, holds that we express approval towards moral sensibilities rather than the object themselves. But the ideal quasi-realist instead adds an ideal impartial advisor as part of the reflective equilibrium which is expressed via attitude and then matched with (or not matched with) what we ourselves think about the situation we are judging.

If the argument in the *The Moral Attitude* chapter is correct, then we are on the right track to deny that preferences are on a par with moral attitudes. If this is the case, and if ideal quasi-realism can do the job, then we should be able to reply to Enoch's challenge successfully.

Let us turn to the second notion of metaethical neutrality. Dworkin's argument, as we saw earlier in the chapter, concludes that there is no distinction between metaethics and ethics on the quasi-realist theory. Let us explore if this is true.

### **Impartiality and Standing One's Ground: Dworkin's Argument**

Dworkin calls views which argue against the claim that there is objective truth "sceptical". This claim may appear simple at first, but far from it. We must unpack what, at the very least, Dworkin means by "objective truth" before we can proceed. On his view, objective truth can be read as mind-independent truth. That is, truth which is not dependent on myself, it is out there in the world, unrelated to me. My having never existed would have no impact on the objective truths about particular matters. It is important to have Dworkin's view of objective truth at the forefront to avoid confusion since the quasi-realist *does* allow for claims of mind-independence, but this is done via reading mind independence claims as normative. When Dworkin claims that certain views, quasi-realism included, deny that there is objective truth we must remember the sense in which he means it. He thinks the expressivist denies the form of objectivity he is discussing; namely, that morality is a descriptive enterprise.

The views which deny the form of objectivity detailed above are called skeptical by Dworkin. He mentions two versions of skepticism; the wholesale skeptic, and the selective skeptic (Dworkin, 1996 p. 88). The wholesale skeptic claims that there is no viable defence of objective truth in any sense. She may deny mathematical truth along with evaluative truth. The selective skeptic is perfectly happy with some objective truths if they are descriptive, but they deny that evaluative truths are descriptive, and thus they don't enter into objective truth claims. In other words, they deny that evaluative discourse is capable of objective truth in the mind-independent and robust

sense given above. It is the latter kind of skeptic which Dworkin is concerned with, and he calls these selective skeptics “Archimedean” Skeptics (later, Selective Archimedean Skeptics) (1996, p. 88).

The Archimedean Skeptic claims that one can judge one discourse via another. That is, one can “stand outside a whole body of belief, and to judge it as a whole from premises or attitudes that are nothing to it” (1996, p. 88). Dworkin claims that even the Archimedean cannot be a total Archimedean in every sense, they must stand somewhere. As he succinctly puts it, one can’t be skeptical all the way down (1996, p. 88). Dworkin employs a claim which we will explore in more detail later, but which is important to briefly mention now for clarity: the Archimedean cannot be a skeptic all the way down because ultimately their skeptical claim that there is no truth or falsity about whether abortion is wrong is itself a substantive moral claim (1996, p. 89).

This claim is clearly targeting Blackburn’s view. As we saw in section seven the quasi-realist construal of a mind-independent claim is to say that when someone make a mind-independent claim what they are doing is making a moral claim (1984). As we shall see, it is because the quasi-realist agrees to this claim already that she ends up in hot water regarding Dworkin’s argument. For now, however, let us explore more about how Dworkin carves up the debate.

Dworkin distinguishes between two different forms of scepticism; internal scepticism and external scepticism. The internal skeptic uses general claims to deny certain positive moral claims. They say something like; if x held, then y would be true. X does not hold. So, y is not true (1996, p. 91). Dworkin claims that since an internal skeptic makes use of the “x does not hold” claim, then they are not skeptical “all the way down”; they require a general claim of this sort to get their scepticism going. There are two features, Dworkin’s claims, which define internal scepticism; neutrality, and austerity.



The second feature we have discussed above, the internal skeptic cannot be thoroughly skeptical about all claims. The first feature concerns neutrality. Dworkin claims that internal scepticism is a “substantive position” and due to this has “direct implications for action” (1996, p. 92). These features are important to note, because the Archimedean skeptic claims that their external position does not have these features and that by lacking these features their theory is more philosophically advantageous. Dworkin argues against this claim and aims to show that the Archimedean skeptic also has these features. For our purposes we will be concerned with whether the Archimedean has the feature of neutrality or not. I will argue that in an important sense the quasi-realist retains her Archimedean status and thus her neutrality. I will not be concerned with the second feature – austerity – unless it informs the discussion on neutrality.

First then, let us look at these two defining features which the Archimedean view is assumed to hold. The second, austerity, is the view that there is no reliance on “general positive moral judgements” (1996, p. 92) and the first is neutrality; the view that that the metaethical discourse does not imply a particular moral view, that is, the metaethical view is not going to side with one moral judgement over another in virtue of the content of the metaethical view (this definition, as we’ll see, will become a little tricky to parse this way once we get into the thick of the discussion).

The primary feature of what Dworkin calls a selective Archimedean skeptic is that they are only skeptical about “further claims”; that is, claims which are metaphysical or philosophical (1996, p. 92). They are not skeptical about first order moral judgements. Dworkin’s denies that the selective Archimedean’s position is metaethically neutral. He offers the following example.

Suppose that there are four people arguing about the morality of abortion (1996, p. 94). The first person thinks abortion is forbidden in all cases, the second person thinks abortion is mandatory

in all cases, and the third person thinks abortion is permissible but not mandatory. The third person's view, Dworkin points out, is neutral between person 1 and person 2, but not wholesale neutral; they still have a moral position. The fourth person claims that person 1, 2 and 3 are all speaking erroneously. Moral judgements, claims person 4, do not have truth conditions, there are no moral properties, and no moral facts (1996, p. 94). Person 4, Dworkin claims, is not neutral. She claims that it is "a mistake both to oppose and demand an abortion on moral grounds" (1996, p. 95). The only difference between person 4's claim and persons 1, 2, and 3, is that person 4 has made use of metaphysical language. Dworkin demands an argument from the Archimedean for why person four is saying anything neutral at all. That is, the Archimedean needs to show the sense in which she really is discussing metaphysics and not first-order discourse.

Rorty, whom Dworkin typifies as a classic Archimedean, claims that there are two levels of discourse. On the first level is talk between you and me. On this level something like a mountain has always existed and always will, regardless of our existence (1996, p. 96). On the second level, the Archimedean level, we can ponder on whether mountains exist in Reality-In-Itself. On the second level we have the philosophical discussion of mountains and their existence. Dworkin claims, however, that for the split in the discourse to make sense, different meanings needs to be given for each level. Rorty writes that we can think of first level discourse as being an internal proposition; in this case internal to geology (1996, p. 96). We can think of the second level discourse as an external proposition; a proposition which is external to geology. But this, Dworkin's claims, does not do much to explain the difference between an internal and an external proposition. If the Archimedean attempts to explain what the difference is in further detail she will encounter a dilemma:

1. Give Mountain the same meaning it has on the first level as it does on the second.

or

2. Give mountain a special meaning, for example that mountains “are a necessary feature of the universe” (1996, p. 96).

Option 1 does not offer a separate definition and so it starts to look strange for the Archimedean to claim that there is discourse split. Option 2 gives a special meaning but, Dworkin claims, it means the theory loses its bite. The critical element is lost on this meaning because it is no longer about a belief someone, or at least about something a philosopher, holds (1996, p. 96).

Dworkin applies the dilemma above to the Archimedean about morality and poses two questions:

1. Is there a way to understand further claims (philosophical or metaphysical claims) as moral claims? (1996, p. 97)

or

2. Is there a way to understand further claims as metaethical claims? (1996, p. 97)

For Dworkin we should go for question one, further claims, which are broadly mind-independent claims can be plausibly interpreted to be first order claims. They are, Dworkin claims, an elaboration, clarification, or a restatement of the original moral judgement (1996, p. 97). For example, the original statement might be something like “abortion is morally wrong”, and the further claims about it might be “abortion is objectively morally wrong”, “it is true that abortion is morally wrong” and so on.

These further claims simply elaborate on the original statement. Dworkin claims that there can be a few different readings of these further claims. Read naturally these claims simply are elaborations, they are “metaphorical” and used to distinguish judgements from those viewed as dependent (1996, p. 99). For example, my saying abortion is objectively morally wrong I am telling you not just that I think abortion is wrong, but that I don’t think the wrongness of abortion depends on myself for its wrongness (1996, p. 99).

A metaphysical reading doesn’t fare much better for support of option two. On the metaphysical approach the further claims are metaphysical positions (1996, p. 100). That is, when I claim “abortion is objectively wrong” I mean to say that, for example, there exists some moral fact which makes it the case that abortion is objectively wrong. But this answer for what further claims are won’t do.

Dworkin claims that by giving an answer of this kind the Archimedean is begging the question. Dworkin’s writes “we are trying to decide not whether the further claims can be translated to make them seem more metaphysical but whether we can understand those philosophical translations as themselves anything other than first order evaluative claims” (1996, p. 100). The challenge is to understand how the sentences “abortion is objectively wrong” can be anything other than an internal first order proposition” (1996, p. 100). It appears, then, that the Archimedean begs the question if she already assumes the further claims are metaphysical and then claims they offer a metaphysical stance. What Dworkin’s wants is an argument which shows why we should think further claims are anything but internal claims. This argument must establish the extra thing metaphysics adds, if it can be shown that metaphysics does add something to the internal first order claim, then we will no longer be begging the question. If, however, it turns out that the metaphysics adds nothing, then it will support Dworkin’s position that further external claims really are just internal claims.

Dworkin argues that we must accept external claims are internal claims by taking two seemingly different positions and showing that they are saying the same thing. Suppose we have Alan, who “thinks that the only thing that makes an act right is its maximising power” (1997, p. 101). We also have Bob who “thinks that the property of rightness and the property of maximising power are the very same property” (1996, 101). Both Bob and Alan are saying the same thing, the only difference between the two of them, Dworkin’s points out, is that Bob adds some metaphysical jargon and Alan does not. Bob’s jargon does not add anything to the meaning of what he is saying, they ultimately both want to get across the meaning that they support a utilitarian view.

Dworkin’s main claim is that the metaphysics adds nothing new or nothing less to Bob’s claim in comparison to Alan’s. And it is this lack of anything additional that Dworkin’s needs for his argument that external claims are internal claims to go through. However, one may argue that even if it looks like Bob and Alan are saying the same thing when we delve a little deeper into why Bob and Alan are saying particular claims, we find support for the view that there is a distinct metaphysical meaning to what Bob says in contrast to what Alan says.

Suppose we ask both Alan and Bob why they hold their particular views: Alan’s about straightforward utilitarianism, Bob’s about the more metaphysical utilitarian view. When I ask Alan why he holds his view he might offer a more detailed utilitarian argument for why maximising happiness really is the right thing. In other words, he might give more internal propositions to support his view. Bob on the other hand might offer us two examples, if he takes our “why?” to be a question about rightness, or another moral matter, he, like Alan, might offer a more detailed utilitarian argument. If, however, he takes our “why?” to be about his carving up of the landscape in terms of properties he will give a metaphysical view. What is going on here is Bob may give his first answer because he takes my question to be demanding a

justificatory answer. What I want to know is why I *ought* to act as if the right thing to do is to maximise happiness for all. He takes my second question to demand more explanation as to the use of the word “property”. I may follow up with the question “why should I take anything to be a property of something at all”.

Controversy of the question above aside, Bob is telling me something if you read Bob as offering both an explanatory and justificatory claim and not just a justificatory claim. That is, it is only by reading Bob as making a claim about what one ought to do that delivers the verdict Dworkin’s wants. By adding “property”, however, one can also question that use of that word alone – separately from the ought claim itself.

The reason that Bob is adding something new is that he is drawing on a general claim and joining it with a specific claim about utilitarianism. Now, Dworkin might accuse me of begging the question here; I am doing exactly what he said the Archimedean said couldn’t do; I’m already assuming that metaphysics is being discussed. But it is not true that Bob isn’t saying anything different to Alan because we could give a different metaphysics than the one Bob is discussing. Suppose Bob said “it is objectively true that x” and Betty said “it is subjectively true that x”. Suppose also that Bob and Betty hold the same Utilitarian view for their first order judgements. When we ask Bob and Betty what I ought to do about moral case x, they will give utilitarian reasons. When I ask them whether they think moral truth is objective or subjective, they will give me different answers. If the first order moral claim were the same as the metaethical explanation, then it would be difficult for us to understand Bob and Betty’s different explanations. We can understand them, so we can assume there is a separation between metaethics and ethics.

If the above is correct, then the expressivist manoeuvre of changing the metaethical question to a normative one doesn’t mean that expressivists think our moral judgements and the explanation

of them collapse into one another. Again, we saw in the section on Enoch's argument, one can talk about the function of different discourses without confusion. The justificatory normative discourse targets the moral ought: it tells us why we should do x and not y. The explanatory metaethics tells us what we mean when we say we should do x and not y, but it is not a part of the justification itself. It may sit next to moral discourse, but it is not itself moral.

### **An Expressivist Reading of Further Claims**

Let us consider an expressivist reading of the further claims next. On this reading an internal proposition is an expression of an attitude or stance, rather than a description or assertion.

Dworkin cites Gibbard to offer the motivational framework for the expressivist position. For Gibbard, if we embrace descriptivism, we must also embrace Platonism (1990, p. 154) But this motivation for the position, Dworkin writes, merely begs the question he is asking: it assumes that the Platonic propositions are not themselves internal propositions (1996, p. 109). Dworkin goes further than this, however, he claims that if we take the Platonist to be making internal claims, then a rejection of Platonism is a rejection of morality. And so, if the expressivist wishes to retain her title of neutrality, she must also accept the challenge Dworkin has offered; she must explain what the difference is between external and internal claims.

The other option is to interpret external claims as internal ones. And this is the strategy Blackburn takes, not in particular answer to Dworkin, but as a fundamental part of the quasi-realist package (Blackburn, 1996, MS). If I said something like "cruelty to children is not morally wrong" I would be, according to the expressivist, expressing what you (would hopefully) take to be an abhorrent moral view. Of course, this may motivate Dworkin's view, but it is Mackie's Error Theory which quasi-realism is a response to. Put simply quasi-realism rejects that our face value moral discourse is erroneous. We can have access to realistic sounding moral talk, without

committing any error. We can do this, Blackburn claims, by giving a projectivist account of our realist sounding moral discourse.

The way the quasi-realist answers the error theorist, however, lands her in hot water. The second option that Blackburn accepts; that seemingly external propositions are internal expressions swallows, Dworkin's claims, the quasi-realist project whole. The quasi-realist programme does not have any logical space in which to exist given the parameters of its own programme.

Dworkin argues that 1. Blackburn claims "that the wrongness of cruelty does not depend on attitudes because, he says, that statement is internal to the "business" of expressing attitudes, and so must be treated like other first-order moral claim" (1996, 111). But this leaves the quasi-realist high and dry because 2. It is unclear what quasi-realists can be projectivist about if all external claims are internal first order views. That is, if projectivism is aimed at external claims, but there are no external claims really, only internal ones, then projectivism seems to have no target. Worse still, if Dworkin is right then "realists' have committed no error which Blackburn's 'projectivism' or 'quasi-realism' corrects (1996, p. 111).

As Dworkin rightly points out Blackburn does consider external questions about morality. We can think about the external questions we have about morality in terms of naturalism (1996, p. 111). We should, Blackburn claims, see morality as an activity; one in which improvement, weighing up of options, and adjusting all feature (1996, p. 111). But this answer is not enough to satisfy Dworkin because it does not yet provide anything unique to quasi-realism. If the realist can say the same thing, then quasi-realism is yet to carve out the metaethical space she needs.

Dworkin's suggests that Blackburn hints at a further elaboration on what the quasi-realist's unique stance is. The quasi-realist rejects the view that there are no moral properties, and she



endorses the view that there are only attitudes (1996, p. 111). But although this hints at what the quasi-realist stands for, it is not, yet, enough. Dworkin's claims that we need to understand the claims about there being moral properties and only attitudes as consistent with the quasi-realist claim that "the wrongness of cruelty does not depend on attitudes" (1996, p. 111). This seems to be a strange claim for the quasi-realist to make given her earlier claim that there are only attitudes. It seems as if the quasi-realist project is inconsistent. How can there be only attitudes, but cruelty not depend on those attitudes? Dworkin's claims that this reads as if cruelty depends upon something which isn't real (1996, p. 112).

Blackburn seems to have the same problem we encountered before. He wants to distinguish between external and internal claims but cannot do this. Dworkin's writes that "he has no way of separating the supposedly external mistakes the projectivist corrects in the name of naturalism from the internal convictions he embraces as part of the 'business' of morality" (1996, p. 112). The quasi-realist approach to moral discourse seems to remove, Dworkin claims, the very external mistake she set out to correct. If a claim about the wrongness of cruelty is a real state of affairs is read internally, and is no different to a claim about the wrongness of cruelty, then where is the mistake in the first claim to which the quasi-realist objects. If we read our moral claims, even the most realist sounding ones, as exactly that, only realist sounding, then where has the mistake gone? If the judgement about the wrongness of cruelty being a real state of affairs is "an internal insight, then the projectivist" Dworkin writes "has nothing left to dissent from, and his theory swallows itself, the Cheshire cat of moral philosophy" (1996, p. 112).

Blackburn agrees that he must find external claims to make it clear how his quasi-realist position is unique. He cites the function of the moral proposition as one of the primary claims he makes as a quasi-realist; that the moral proposition must be seen in terms of its motivational function. Blackburn then cites his work on indirect contexts (which is also a proposed solution to the

Frege-Geach problem) for how he has carved his unique metaethical position. Blackburn also claims that his project is explanatory, rather than adversarial (1996).

That is, he is attempting to explain the nature of the moral proposition. Dworkin's asks for what the projectivist dissents from, and Blackburn refuses to offer what Dworkin's requests of him. He writes "It is not, for me, primarily a matter of locating something (Platonism, for instance) that I dissent from: it is a matter of understanding the nature of the moral judgment, and of exploring and explaining our right to the propositional attitudes it supports" (1996, MS). What is important for the quasi-realist project is understanding the moral proposition first and seeing what the consequences of that might be (a rejection of Platonism), rather than first pointing to a piece of metaethics and rejecting it. But of course, there is at least one thing the quasi-realist can and does dissent from; she rejects the view that our realistic sounding moral talk is erroneous.

She points to the error theorist and rejects him wholesale. This is not only a dissention from a piece of metaethical theory, it is also (as we saw) a motivator for Blackburn's entire project. Up steps the ideal quasi-realist to the plate. Ideal quasi-realm, which I've explained and argued for in this thesis may be able to provide the missing piece of the puzzle that Dworkin is asking for. Recall that Dworkin claimed that the quasi-realist seems to suggest that the judgement that it's wrong to be cruel to children seems to be based on nothing if projectivism is true. Dworkin also suggests that the wrongness is to be found in the attitudes themselves, because if there is nothing else than attitudes, then what else can cruelty can depend on.

The ideal quasi-realist, much like the quasi-realist, denies that cruelty depends on the attitudes alone. Once again, the quasi-realist is wrongly understood to be suggesting morality is attitudes only, rather than made up of moral sensibilities which include attitudes. The ideal quasi-realist, in response to Dworkin can simply say that given the information about the situation, Ideal You's

knowledge of empirical evidence, psychological theory and the like. Plus Regular You's descriptive beliefs or awareness of the situation, we can generate two attitudes from both inputs. The input, given what we know of child psychology should give an output of disapproval. And the disapproval will be backed up by Ideal You's attitude.

## **Conclusion**

I've argued that on both versions of metaethical neutrality the quasi-realist can retain a distinction between both domains. The solution to the problems relied correcting a misunderstanding about the role of attitudes for both Blackburn and Ideal Quasi-Realisms. Dworkins' may reply that the above doesn't help solve the problem: it still all depends on attitudes. But I don't think any theory is in better stead here. Even if the moral facts are the input and the belief the output, one still have to rely on the person having good moral sense to get the right verdict. But if what you want is a metaethical explanation of what that person (whether they endorse cruelty or not) is expressing, then the ideal quasi-realist can happy provide one.

We move away from neutrality to Sharon Streets' debunking argument. An argument which is hot on the heels of the themes of this chapter, where Street argues that the quasi-realist simply isn't anti-realist enough. Importantly, she denies that there is a distinction between the ethical and the metaethical, and that a Neurath's boat model of improvement in moral sensibilities fails. I shall argue that she is wrong on both counts.

## **Chapter 5. Evolution, Mind-Independence, and Quasi-Realism**

## **Introduction: Streets' Argument Against the Quasi-Realist**

Streets' argument (Shafer-Landau, 2011) targets the quasi-realist's claim that they can both make sense of a form of mind-independence claim Street calls "independent normative truth as such" on the one hand (the independent normative truth claim), and accept an evolutionary story of the development of our normative values on the other (the causal claim). Streets chief concern is to argue that the quasi-realist cannot accommodate these two essential parts of the quasi-realist story; she either fails to accommodate the naturalist underpinning of her theory, or she fails to accommodate a realist notion – independent normative truth as such – via her projectivist quasi-realism. Either way, her theory loses something crucial to it.

Streets argument against the quasi-realist is a reapplication of her Darwinian Dilemma argument originally used to challenge realist theories of value (Shafer-Landau, 2011). Street argues that realist theories of value (the kind which rejects broadly naturalist claims) cannot make sense of both claims to moral truth, and the evolutionary story of how our morality developed.

She takes this argument and applies it to quasi-realism (2011) by employing two main claims: the causal claim, and the independent normative truth as such claim. Acceptance of the causal claim is motivated by an appeal to the aims of the quasi-realist. The quasi-realist wishes to explain and justify our realist sounding moral discourse on an anti-realist basis (1984, p.180). For Blackburn, the explanation and justification of our moral discourse is justified and explained via his projectivism. Later, he adopts the name "expressivism" to explain his anti-realist, but both terms, for him, mean the same thing. Blackburn's projectivist, he writes, "[...] asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it" (1984, p.182).

Street's argument is, as Blackburn points out, is rather surprising. Blackburn writes that "the point of expressivist theories is to avoid the metaphysical and epistemological problems which realist theories of ethics [...], are supposed to bring with them. Again, it is important to remember the overall motivation. This is to explain the practise of moralizing, using causal language, and so on, in terms only of our exposure to a thinner reality – a world which contains only some lesser states of affairs, to which we respond and in which we have to conduct our lives" (1984, p. 169).

Before we look at Street's argument a recap on projectivism is in order. Projection, as we saw in the introduction amounts to a gilding or staining on all natural objects. For both Blackburn, our attitudes are projected onto the world. As Hume writes that "Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition [...] After all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation" (Hume and Schneewind, 1983, p. 88). Blackburn's view differs in the details from Hume's, he does not adopt a "commitment to particular operations of passions such as sympathy" (Blackburn, 1993, p. 167) but he does, as we know, adopt a Humean projectivism. "anything new, he writes, comes in the quasi-realism, whose point is to show that, since projectivism is consistent with, and indeed explains, the important surface phenomena of ethics, many of the arguments against it miss their mark" (Blackburn, 1993, p. 167).

Projectivism Blackburn writes is the view that we have "sentiments and reactions caused by the natural features of things, and we 'gild or stain' the world by describing it as if it contained features answering to these sentiments, in the way that the niceness of an ice cream answers to the pleasure it gives us" (1993, p. 152). Now that we have reminded ourselves of the bare bones of projectivism we can return to our discussion of Street's argument.

Recall that we started by discussion two crucial features of Street's argument. The causal claim, and the independence as such claim. Recall also that the quasi-realist's aim is to echo our realist sounding normative discourse, and thus, if Streets' causal claim highlights a feature of our ordinary normative discourse, then the quasi-realist must explain and justify. If she does not do this, then her philosophical programme fails.<sup>47</sup> We generally, Street claims, accept that causal factors can influence our normative judgements. For example, "the fact that he was beaten as a child explains his inability to recognize the cruelty of treating his own child that way" (2011, p. 9), or that being drunk can influence our want to do something perilous (2011, p. 9). Street claims that we use causal explanations like these to explain why someone might be blocked from the normative truth (2011, p. 9).

Street requires more than the causal claim to motivate her argument. She also - since this an argument that typically targets realism - requires a metaethically realist concept or claim to target. It is not so obvious, however, that the quasi-realist has anything *to* target. Street, however, argues that there is. Street explains that quasi-realists happily make independent normative truth claims.

She claims that for the quasi-realist an independent normative truth on the ethical level can be explained via expressivism. For Blackburn, independent normative truths are a feature of our moral discourse, and we can go on claiming that there are independent normative truths even with an expressivist understanding of what we are doing when we express such things. On Blackburn's view when one claims there are independent normative truths, one is expressing a normative claim.

<sup>47</sup> Blackburn's quasi-realism is concerned primarily with moral discourse, rather than the broader normative discourse, but since the moral is a subset of the normative, Streets' argument can be applied to quasi-realism. Where I would normally use "ordinary moral discourse" I will use "ordinary normative discourse" to be consistent with Street.

Recall that it is not our attitudes of approval or disapproval which determine the wrongness of an action. Rather, Blackburn claims that it is, for example, the cruelty of a cruel action which makes it wrong, not our disapproval of the action. The cruelty might well result in your disapproval of the action, but if you had approved of the cruelty instead, then this would not make the action any less wrong. By taking beliefs about the world as central to the wrongness of an action, rather than only our own sentiments the expressivist positions herself against the subjectivist. She is not simply reporting an attitude she has towards an action when she claims it is morally wrong.

Blackburn, as we've seen, is perfectly happy to say that our moral discourse includes independent normative truths, and Street is interested in how the quasi-realist might explain this notion. Street asks how the quasi-realist should explain Ann's judgement that "there are mind independent judgements" (2011, p. 10). Street makes use of Blackburn's answer in the Appendix of *Ruling Passions* (1998, p. 311) to explain how quasi-realism makes sense of Ann's claim.

Blackburn's answer in the appendix is a response to the following question; "when philosophers ask whether moral truths are mind-dependent, the question appears to be at the meta-level. So, aren't the projectivist's moral truths mind-dependent after all?" (Blackburn, 1998, p. 311).

Blackburn responds with the following "the question appears to be asked at the meta-level, and perhaps is intended at a meta-level question. But there is no such meta-level question" (1998, p. 311). A judgement, this time that "moral truths are mind-dependent" amounts to an evaluation of the relevant possible worlds for the general form of the claim, that is possible worlds where there really are no people, or where people hold different attitudes but where X occurs, and to then make a moral judgement about those possible worlds (1998, p. 311).

Street claims that Ann's judgement that "there are independent normative truths" can't be adequately explained by an appeal to substantive lists. That is, when Ann utters "there are independent normative truths" she is providing a list of substantive truths that she accepts (2011, p. 10).<sup>48</sup> For example, her acceptance or rejection of moral claims concerning a possible world where dogs feel pain, but people do not think it is wrong. Her substantive independent truth on this case would be that it is an independent truth that it is wrong to kick dogs for fun. Street, however, does not think the substantive list explanation properly captures the claim that Ann is making because the claim appears to be non-substantive in its nature. A substantive list account may capture what it is to express independent normative truths, but it fails to capture the non-substantive independent normative truth as such.

Street argues for this claim by introducing an interlocuter who disagrees with Ann on some normative matter: Ben. She explains that Ben agrees there are independent normative truths, but he disagrees on what the substantive versions of those independent normative truths are. Ben, suppose, holds the opposite judgements to Ann's judgements about what independent normative truths are. He claims that "kicking dogs for fun is morally permissible", whereas Ann claims that "kicking dogs for fun is not morally permissible". Street argues that if quasi-realists wish to echo our ordinary realist sounding moral discourse, then they have to make sense of what appears to be an agreement between Ann and Ben (2011, p. 10). That is, although Ann and Ben disagree on what they take to be the substantive normative truth on whether or not it is permissible to kick dogs for fun, they both agree that when they both claim that "there are independent normative truths" they mean the same thing (2011, p. 10).

<sup>48</sup> I am using the word "truth" here for convenience and to keep in tune with Street's discussion. Truth, on the quasi-realist account, is minimal. As such when I use the word "truth", I refer to truth of the minimal kind.



Further to this, we would want to say that Ann and Ben understand one another, they are not simply talking past one another. Street claims that their agreement is not captured by the substantive list answer because on this answer it only looks like Ann and Ben disagree. They share no substantive judgements in common (let's say), yet still both think there are independent normative truths. Thus, Street argues, the quasi-realist can't use her substantive list explanation to explain independent normative truth as such. Independent normative truth as such, is, Street claims, what Ann and Ben agree on. And if independent normative truth as such is part of our ordinary moral discourse, then the quasi-realist must explain it in expressivist terms.

Independent normative truth as such is a piece of realism the quasi-realist must plausibly accept as both part of our ordinary moral discourse and thus something to explain for her argument to follow. Let us, then, stop at this juncture and see whether she can legitimately proceed.

Something crucial has occurred in Street's argument to allow her to shift from talk of independent normative truths, to talk of *the*<sup>49</sup> independent normative truth as such.

The move is important, because if the quasi-realist can show how acceptance of independent normative truths does not also issue in acceptance of the independent normative truth as such, then she can block Street's argument. Let us look, then, at Street's argument once again but in more detail.

Street's first move is to have us "imagine Ben, who strenuously agrees with Ann that there are independent normative truths, but who takes an entirely opposed view as to what those truths are" (2011, p. 9). Street then makes her second move, the notion that Ann and Ben, despite their substantive disagreement, also agree on something and the quasi-realist must explain their agreement: "If quasi-realists are to succeed at their project of mimicking realism, then they must

<sup>49</sup> My italics.

be able to capture the idea that when Ann says “There are independent normative truths,” and when Ben utters the same sentence, they are agreeing on something” (2011, p. 10).

The third move takes this agreement and, if successful, allows Street to move from plural to singular non-substantive normative truth: “To accommodate the idea that Ann and Ben agree, therefore, quasi-realists must admit as intelligible what I am calling “talk about the independent normative truth as such”—in other words, talk which presupposes nothing substantive about what the independent normative truths in question are” (2011, p. 10 – 11). The plausibility for why the quasi-realist should explain the independent normative truth as such hangs on the agreement between Ann and Ben. The agreement itself, however, is unclear and so this lack of clarity prompts a question: how should we understand the agreement between Ann and Ben? Street parses it in terms of them both uttering the same sentence, the implication being that they mean the same thing and thus they need to both refer to the same thing, hence they can’t simply be referring to the judgements they individually accept.

The third move, one might suggest, doesn’t seem to follow. For example, suppose Ann and Ben were discussing whether there are red tables or not. Ann might say “it’s true that there are red tables”. Ben disagrees and says “it is not true that there are red tables” they substantively disagree, that is, they disagree about something: for example, whether they have seen any red tables. Ann might explain her claim by pointing to instances of red tables she has encountered. Ben might explain that he has never come across a red table hence his utterance that there are no red tables.<sup>50</sup> Ann and Ben seem to be generalising from instances or lack of instances of red tables, that is, from their interaction with natural world, they have come to a belief about it. This

<sup>50</sup> We won’t get into the debates over what “red” means here, all we need to know for argument is that red and tables are something we can plausibly witness, with no particular view on what sense perception is.

example obviously differs from the normative kind; there is no attitudes on display here<sup>51</sup>. The point is that Ann and Ben's claim to truth appear to be generalisations of instances of red tables.

Of course, the example above is a substantive one, we now need to turn to a non-substantive example to offer any proper comparison to the normative case. Suppose that Ann and Ben are discussing whether there are truths about the world. Suppose Ann claims that "there are truths about the world" where, for simplicity's sake, we understand truths about the world to be natural ones. Ben also claims, using the same parameters, that "there are truths about the world". Ben and Ann both utter the same sentence "there are truths about the world", and so they agree on something, it looks like they mean the same thing when they both utter the sentence. They agree that there are truths about the world, but they disagree on what these truths amount to substantively. Does it then make sense to suggest Ann and Ben are doing something over and above uttering a claim about a collection of substantive truths they take to be true of the world respectively? In other words, does it make sense to then posit Street's third step and suggest that we must, to understand Ann and Ben's agreement as having nothing to do with anything substantive about the world?

To figure this out let us look at the normative case again and examine what type of utterance "there are normative truths" is. Remember that we are not dealing with one utterance, but two. Ann and Ben are both saying the same thing, and according to Street they both mean the same thing. We, then, need to understand what they are saying according to the quasi-realist in order to understand what Ann and Ben agree upon. Our first task, then, is to go all the way back to the beginning; we first need to understand what it is to have what Blackburn (1993, p. 168) calls an "ethical commitment". Fundamentally, Blackburn writes, an ethical commitment is a practical

<sup>51</sup> We won't discuss the implications of our making quasi-realism global lest we make this chapter twice its word count.

stance or attitude (1993, p. 168). Blackburn is careful to note that we may call the attitude a “belief, but that is after the work has been done [...] For in this branch of philosophy, it is not what you finish by saying, but how you manage to say it that matters” (1993, 168). Our ethical commitments, then, are practical attitudes. These attitudes are a “pressure on choice and action” (1993, p. 168).

Blackburn’s view of ethical commitments as practical stances is informed by evolutionary theory. He writes:

“Obviously, the emergence of cooperative and altruistic stances is not mere armchair speculation. It can be supplemented by both theoretical and empirical studies. It is noteworthy that the account will insist upon the nonrepresentational, conative function for the stance. The evolutionary success that attends some stances and not others is a matter of behaviour to which they lead. In other words, it is the direct consequences of the pressure on action that matter. Evolutionary success may attend the animal that helps those that have helped it but it would not attend any allegedly possible animal that thinks it ought to help but does not. In the competition for survival, it is what the animal *does* that matters” (Blackburn, 1993, p. 168)

Blackburn, then, claims ethical stances are practical and the practicality and success of some stances over others is informed by evolutionary success. How, then, given what Blackburn claims, should we understand Ann and Ben’s agreement? There are a few options we can consider. First, we can deny that “there are normative truths” is itself a normative claim in need

of explanation. Strictly speaking, the quasi-realist is only interested with moral discourse, rather than normative discourse wholesale. However, it looks like Street could merely tweak Ann and Ben's agreement to "there are moral truths" and have the same sort of argument. And while it is harder to conceive of someone uttering "there are normative truths" in an ordinary disagreement, it is not inconceivable.

Moreover, someone uttering "there are moral truths" is easy to imagine, not just as a metaethical claim, but as a moral one too. One might, in arguing against someone who disagrees with a particular moral claim, suggest they are morally wrong to accept this claim because they are moral truths. Or they might, in claiming that the moral theory they accept is true that this is an example of moral truth. There are ways, then, to look upon this utterance as a moral one. And if so, then the quasi-realist must explain how we should understand it.

How should we think about agreement according to quasi-realism? To answer this question, we should look at how the quasi-realist parses disagreement and see if the same sort of story can be applied to agreement cases. Regular disagreement can be explained fairly easily on Blackburn's account. If Ann and Ben disagree on something, suppose, if Ann thinks abortion is morally permissible, and Ben does not. Then their disagreement can be explained in terms of disapproval. Ann's disagreement with Ben amounts to her disapproval of a sensibility like Ben's which takes the facts about abortion and reacts with a negative conative state. In other words, she rejects adopting Ben's sensibility toward abortion and she accepts her own approving sensibility toward abortion. Ben, in contrast, rejects Ann's sensibility toward abortion, and accepts his own disapproving sensibility. This sort of explanation may appear similar to what we've seen before; it looks like the substantive list account. Equally, when we look at how agreement is explained on the quasi-realist account it will be couched in terms of approval. If

Ann and Ben agree that kicking dogs for fun is morally wrong they approve of sensibilities which take the input of cruelty to the dog, and output disapproval (1984, p. 218).

How, then, does the quasi-realist make sense of agreement when it is non-substantive? Street, as we've seen, rejects a substantive list view of independent normative truth as such. The quasi-realist can't, she claims, simply cite a list of the substantive claims Ann and Ben accept; this might demonstrate how they disagree substantively, but it doesn't explain in what sense Ann and Ben, despite their substantive differences, agree that there are independent normative truths. Blackburn's quasi-realist treatment of mind-independent claims can help us out.

Recall that for Blackburn mind-independent claims can be expressed as the endorsement or rejection of different sensibilities. For example, below Blackburn is discussing why, on a projectivist picture, truth is not mind-dependent. The discussion is prior to Blackburn's acceptance of deflationary truth, in *Spreading the Word* he suggests that truth could be constructed from a "best possible set of attitudes" where "best possible" should be "thought of as the limiting set which would result from taking all possible opportunities for improvement of attitude" (1984, p. 198). On this view a claim that a moral judgement is truth amounts to a claim that the moral judgement is part of this best possible set (1984, p. 198). Blackburn, as I've mentioned, moves on from this view of truth (1998). Others, like Alan Thomas (Thomas, 1997), have argued that minimalist theories of truth were superior to projectivist theories of truth, because they don't require a revision of logic and thus don't undermine the contrast between discourses that the projectivist needs to make her case (1997).

Although Blackburn now accepts a deflationary account of truth he still retains his projectivist roots. Thus it would be a mistake to assume that the change from constructed attitudinal truth to deflationary truth meant that we should ignore the valuable and rich projectivist account given in

Spreading the Word (1984). As we've seen throughout the thesis, it is the M\* attitudes which provided a foundation for the ideal quasi-realism I advance. I will give an ideal quasi-realist response towards the end, but for now, let us return to a consideration of how Blackburn can respond to Street.

Blackburn writes:

“Suppose someone said that ‘if we had different sentiments, it would be right to kick dogs’, what could he be up to? Apparently, he endorses a certain sensibility: one which lets information about what people feel dictate its attitude to kicking dogs. But nice people do not endorse such a sensibility. What makes I wrong to kick dogs is the cruelty or pain to the animal. *That* input should yield disapproval and indignation as the output” (1984, p. 218)

The projectivist can make sense of mind-independent claims, then, in terms of approval of certain sensibilities which do not endorse attitudes dictating whether an action is right, and disapproval of attitudes which do. Ann and Ben's agreement is to be understood as them both approving of a sensibility which does not think moral rightness reduce to accepted sentiments.

In the same way that disagreement as such is a clash of attitudes (Stevenson, 1972) agreement as such is a match of attitudes. What does it mean to say our mind-independent judgements, understood expressivistically, are true? It just is to adopt a deflationary understanding of them. The notion of truth, then, is entirely handled by a deflationary account. To say claim P is true, is nothing more than saying claim p (Blackburn, 1998, p. 75) and to say claim p, if it is a mind-independent claim, is to understand it on a projectivist basis.

Now, Street will object to this line of thinking. There is no sense, she will say, that Ann and Ben actually agree on this view, instead it looks as if Ann and Ben are talking past one another. It is plain, however, that they are not talking past one another, it is plausible to imagine that they can both understand one another when they utter the same claim and so we can conclude that they do agree, so this sort of response fails. This seems to be the case on the truth about the world version of the argument, and the normative version of the argument. But we can still say something in response to Street. We can say that Ann and Ben don't agree at all, but this looks like a bullet the quasi-realist shouldn't bite; she does not want a story where people talk past one another, since this would fail to justify our regular discourse. It looks like Street's argument, so far, follows. Let us look more at the normative case to make her point clearer.

Street makes two claims about the plausibility of the quasi-realist's acceptance of having to explain the independent normative truth as such. On the first claim, she writes that the quasi-realist already accepts such claims as intelligible. Street (2011, p. 11), quoting Gibbard, she writes,

“Gibbard, for one, therefore rightly admits such talk as intelligible (2011, p. 263–4).

He offers a proposal which may be understood as explaining the state of mind being expressed when someone talks about the independent normative truth as such:

Normative claims can be true or false, independently of our accepting them. To accept this is, roughly, to restrict your plans to ones that are not contingent on which plans, in the contingencies you plan for, you would accept if that contingency obtained. (2011, p. 183).”

On the first claim the quasi-realist admits independent normative truth as something we both express and which can be explained via an expressivist treatment. On the second claim, as we



have seen, Street argues that the quasi-realist should accept independent normative truth as such as intelligible, that is, one simple way to avoid Street's argument – a straightforward rejection of independent normative truth as such – is not something the quasi-realist should welcome.

With the causal and normative truth claims in place, the foundation for Street's argument is set. She mounts an epistemological challenge for the quasi-realist, and argues that if the expressivist accepts both the causal and the normative truth claims, then they encounter an epistemological problem: quasi-realism renders us hopeless judges of moral truth. Before we discuss this problem in more depth we need to take one last detour. After all, it may seem odd for a metaethical theory to render us hopeless knowers of *moral* truth. Metaethics, one might say, is separate enough from first order moral discourse to have no impact upon it. A key part of Street's worry about quasi-realism is that there is a tension between the metaethical and the normative positions that are held simultaneously by the quasi-realist. The quasi-realist claims that on the normative level he can claim that "there are independent normative truths" and that on the metaethical what is meant by this normative claim is, it turns out, a normative claim which is cashed out in terms of acceptance, rejection, approval, and disapproval. There is nothing mysterious to the independent normative claim, the quasi-realist will say. It is explicable via an internal normative account. Street writes,

"Quasi-realists forcefully argue, however, that on a proper understanding of their view, there is no tension whatsoever involved in simultaneously holding the two positions. The latter position, they explain, is a normative judgment, whereas the former is a meta-level claim explaining what we're doing when we make a normative judgment, and these two levels of claim and understanding do not interact. For many of us, however, it's hard to shake the impression that there is a tension, and in what follows, I argue that this impression is right. We cannot prevent our naturalistic understanding of the nature and origins of normative judgment from interacting

with and ultimately helping to undermine the view that there are independent normative truths—even if we understand this latter view as an internal normative claim” (2011, p. 9)

The quotation above is crucial for understanding Street’s strategy against the quasi-realist. Even if we understand the claim that there are independent normative truths in an expressivist light, she argues that the expressivist’s naturalism will nevertheless undermine the expressivist treatment of the claim. Let us now turn to Blackburn and Gibbard’s reply to Street to see whether the quasi-realist can block Street’s argument.

### **Blackburn and Gibbard’s Response**

We have already seen that the quasi-realist should accept the notion of independent normative truth as such. This doesn’t mean, however, that one should then accept Street’s conclusion that the quasi-realist is in epistemological trouble due to a naturalistic story of value formation plus acceptance of the independent normative truth as such; there need be no undermining. Both Gibbard and Blackburn argue that we can reject Street’s notion of what an expressivist treatment of the independent normative truth as such is. Blackburn argues that the agreement between Ann and Ben doesn’t show that independent normative truth as such is independent of our own values.

Recall that Street’s argument, if it goes through, concludes that the quasi-realist picture renders us hopeless normative judges (2011, p. 14). If the expressivist holds that there is such a thing as independent normative truth as such, and if she also holds that evolution has had a significant influence on our values, then it looks like we are at an epistemological impasse: the quasi-realist

seemingly has no way to correct her values. Street writes, “[...] a process of holding some of those values up for examination in light of others holds little hope of bringing those values into accord with independent normative truths. A badly mistaken set of ultimate values brought into greater coherence is still badly mistaken” (2011, p. 15). Here, Street claims that if evolution has influenced our values, then rational reflection about those values won’t lead us towards the normative truth. It may allow for greater coherence, but nothing more.

Street’s way of parsing the rational reflection objection sheds light on how she understands independent normative truth as such. Blackburn writes that Street understands independent normative truth as such as a Cartesian notion, that is, as something outside our ourselves and our values. Gibbard (2011) claims something similar, suggesting that Street takes independent normative truth as such to be a piece of what he calls Vast Realism. Gibbard argues that the quasi-realist may be in the business of mimicking realism, but this doesn’t mean that she must mimic the strongest possible version of realism. Instead, and Blackburn agrees, the quasi-realist aims to mimic what Gibbard calls “tempered realism”, that is, a form of realism with many of features of vast realism except for one, “the view that moral truths and other normative truths are facts like any other, except that they aren’t empirical, naturalistic truths. They differ from scientific truths in their subject matter, but not in the features that make scientific facts genuine facts (2011 p. 44 – 45). This, both Gibbard and Blackburn claim, is the strong sort of realism independent normative truth as such, when parsed by Street, is a part of.

Tempered realism, however, still retains the notion of standards for normative judgements (Gibbard, 2011, p. 44) but it packs less of a punch than the vast realist’s robustly independent facts existing independently of ourselves. Gibbard, at this juncture, raises two important questions: if tempered realism avoids the problems of vast realism, then first, what is the difference between quasi realism and tempered realism, and second, why opt for quasi-realism at all if tempered realism avoids the tricky features of vast realism? For Gibbard, the answer to the

first question also answers the second. The key difference between quasi-realism and tempered realism is what both theories take to be legitimate explanations for normative judgements. The tempered realist is happy for normative propositions and relations to have what Gibbard calls a “basic explanatory role” (Gibbard, 2011, p. 46).

Blackburn asks whether “Cartesian realism legitimately introduced on the back of the commonality which obtains between Ben and Ann? Each of Benn and Ann contemplates a hypothetical but possible scenario in which they feel differently about something, and each sticks with their actual sentiments as they do so. This is the quasi-realist parsing of the phenomenon on which the talk of ‘independence’ that he is prepared to justify is built. But is what is thereby built a Cartesian realism, bringing scepticism, and the inadequacy of a Neurath’s boat-inspired epistemology, with it?” (2011, MS). Blackburn answers in the negative. He makes a distinction between entertaining a hypothetical scenario where you feel differently to your current sentiments regarding x, and your actual situation in which you are fairly practically certain about your sentiments toward x. This distinction raises two questions: what exactly does this distinction amount to, and how does this answer help the quasi-realist?

First, the distinction Blackburn offers is intended to show the difference between our regular moral judgements which express norms or standards, and judgements of independence which express possible endorsement or rejection of different moral sensibilities (where a moral sensibility is the input of information from the world, and either disapproval or approval follow from that input) (Blackburn, 1984). It is not clear, however, that Blackburn’s distinction helps him fully answer Street’s challenge. Even if Blackburn can show that a cartesian reading of the independent normative truth as such does not follow from Street’s causal and normative claims, there is still a second pressing challenge. The quasi-realist still has to offer a plausible explanation for what we are doing when we make an independent normative truth as such, and she can do this in two ways. She must either extend the view Blackburn uses for independent

normative truths; that Ann and Ben are expressing substantive judgements about themselves. Or she can offer an explanation that does not draw on anything substantive. We have seen that Street and quasi-realist's welcome the latter option, but let us explore the first in more detail to see whether it can shed light on how a quasi-realist substantive response might go.

Recall that Street does not accept this response because she claims it fails to capture what Ann and Ben are agreeing upon. They both disagree about the substantive judgements, but not that there is an independent normative truth of the matter. Street takes this understanding of Blackburn from *Ruling Passions*, he writes, "According to me, 'moral truths are mind-dependent' can *only* summarize a list like 'If there were no people (or people with different attitudes) then X...', where the dots are filled in by some moral claim about X" (1998, p. 31). Note, however, that in the quotation used to explain why Street takes Blackburn to have this view of mind-independence (Street uses this quote in a footnote to expand upon her explanation of Blackburn's substantive list view), or at least that this might be a way of understanding his view he is discussing what it is to express a mind-dependent truth claim, not an independent one.

One might suggest, then that the expression of an mind-dependent moral judgement might differ from an independent moral-judgement, they are seemingly intended to express two different things. On the former, I intend to express that my judgements are up to me in some sense, on the latter I intend to express something that contains an authority outside of myself in the relevant sense. That is, the force of the judgement does not come from my simply approving of it, whereas the force of a dependent judgement results entirely from my attitudes.

Let us have a look at where this quotation comes from in closer detail. Blackburn's substantive list answer was originally an answer to a question in the appendix of *Ruling Passions* (1998, 311). He is asked "aren't the projectivist's moral truths mind-dependent after all?" (1998, 311) since,

according to Blackburn's interlocuter "[...] the projections are clearly mind-dependent. When philosophers ask whether moral truths are mind-dependent, the question appears to be asked at the meta-level" (1998, p. 311) rendering moral truth mind-dependent. Blackburn rejects this line of thinking by denying that there is a meta-level question, on his view the question only appears to be on the meta-level, but it is really on the moral level (1998, 311). A mind-dependent claim about moral truth; "all moral truths are mind-dependent" amounts to considering people with different sentiments (or people with no sentiments) from which a moral claim results. We then assess individual situations (1998, p. 311). For example, suppose a community took kicking dogs for fun to be morally right, then kicking dogs for fun would be right. We can then endorse or reject this sensibility.

This sounds like the suggestion offered by Blackburn (2011, MS) in his reply to Street. He writes, "Each of Benn and Ann contemplates a hypothetical but possible scenario in which they feel differently about something, and each sticks with their actual sentiments as they do so. This is the quasi-realist parsing of the phenomenon on which the talk of 'independence' that he is prepared to justify is built. But is what is thereby built a Cartesian realism, bringing scepticism, and the inadequacy of a Neurath's boat-inspired epistemology, with it? No. What one says about a scenario in which one feels differently about some specific subject, and what one legitimately admits by way of practical certainty are two different things" (2011, MS).

Street might respond to Blackburn by claiming that he cannot restate the quasi-realist account of independence because he has not yet shown that it can accommodate the agreement between Ann and Ben. Street objects the substantive list view because, she claims, the agreement between Ann and Ben cannot be captured by only considering what Ann and Ben accept respectively. This is because what they substantively accept is in disagreement, yet there is not entire

disagreement between them, they both still agree that there is a normative truth of the matter, and so this requires an explanation.

An explanation, Street will demand, must be given. Independent normative truth claims are a part of our ordinary moral discourse, and since the quasi-realist wishes to explain and justify such claims, she must, on pain of failure, explain them. The quasi-realist, however, can content this demand in a few ways: 1. She can claim the substantive list explanation is sufficient for explaining the agreement between Ann and Ben. 2 She can offer a quasi-realist proposal which expands on the substantive list explanation suffice to make it sufficient. 3. She can deny an explanation needs to be given.

The third option, at first glance, is untenable for the quasi-realist. She must give some sort of explanation if her quasi-realism is to succeed. As Blackburn and Gibbard claim, however, the need for an explanation doesn't mean that the explanation given has to be in terms a vast realist would accept. She doesn't, as Blackburn and Gibbard argue, have to give a quasi-realist explanation for a vast realist form of agreement. Gibbard and Blackburn's response, then, attempts 4. Deny that the type explanation that Street requests of the quasi-realist is legitimate. The quasi-realist doesn't need to opt for a truth tracking explanation of independent normative truths, because she doesn't go in for a vast realist version of independent normative truth as such.

If both Gibbard and Blackburn can block Street's argument by claiming independent normative truth as such (in vast realist terms) doesn't follow, then it looks like the quasi-realist is off the hook. Street, however, may not be so quick to agree. There still remains, she might say, the matter of an explanation of independent normative truth as such. Sure, it is not vastly realist in nature, but the quasi-realist still needs to give an explanation of it and one that doesn't appeal to

the substantive list account. Let us look, then, at how legitimate this line of thought is. It is composed of two parts: first, the demand for an explanation of independent normative truth, and second, the demand that the explanation does not rely on substantive lists of what Ann and Ben accept respectively.

The demand for an explanation if a vast realist explanation of the agreement is rejected is plausible. It is, according to the quasi-realist, part of normative discourse that we assume there to be a best answer to something. Ann and Ben both disagree on the substantive truth, but they take it that there really is a better thing to do about *x* or to think about *x*. As Street (2011, p. 11) points out, Gibbard and Blackburn both take independent normative truth to be part of our normative discourse. Quasi-realists take independent normative truth to be something they need to explain, and because this notion is part of our ordinary moral discourse, they also should explain it (Street, 2011, p.11).

Next we turn to the second point: whether the explanation given can rely on the substantive list account. Recall that this account, one of endorsing different sensibilities from a moral point of view, is the way Blackburn would parse independent normative truth. Gibbard, of course, would offer an alternative, but still quasi-realist account, but for now I shall focus on Blackburn's explanation to focus the discussion.

We have already seen the substantive list account of independent normative truth, but the quasi-realist has more to offer. In Blackburn's reply (2011, MS) to Street he also makes use of deflationary truth to explain what is happening between Ann and Ben. That is, he offers an explanation which accounts for independent normative truth as such (an explanation of what it is to express "there are mind-independent truths"), rather than an explanation for what it is to express independent normative truth (something which is happily substantive). He writes:



“Consider then the schema ‘p would have been wrong even had I/my group not believed it to be wrong’. In spite of their different standards, each of Ann and Ben assents to there being instances of this schema. So each believes in what Street calls ‘independence as such’. If you want to know how they might each believe that there are instances of this schema, then we go back to what I have often said about examples like kicking dogs for fun. Maybe softie Ben thinks that it would have been wrong to kick dogs, even had we thought it was right, while flinty Ann, brought up in a less sentimental culture, thinks it would have been OK to kick dogs even if we had thought it was wrong. But that doesn’t prevent there being a commonality when we quantify, and in any event it is common to all such cases. Two deflationists can each believe that John said something true at breakfast, although having different substitutions in mind for ‘John said that p & p’ — which is what the deflationist will offer as the fundamental schema enabling us to understand this use of the notion of truth” (2011, MS).

Here Blackburn makes use of a schema to explain how Ann and Ben still agree on there being an independent normative truth as such whilst disagreeing on the normative truth in its substantive form. The schema of mind-independence which Blackburn proposes is, he claims, equivalent to Gibbard’s explanation of what we are expressing when we utter a mind-independent claim. On Gibbard’s view to express and independent normative truth as such is to take it that:<sup>52</sup>

“Normative claims can be true or false, independently of our accepting them. To accept this is, roughly, to restrict your plans to ones that are not contingent on

<sup>52</sup> Street originally uses this quotation from Gibbard as an archetype of what the quasi-realist would want to say we are expressing when we say “there are mind-independent normative truths as such”. Using the same quotation that Street makes use of from Gibbard is, to my mind, the clearest way to explain this portion of her argument.

which plans, in the contingencies you plan for, you would accept if that contingency obtained” (Gibbard, 2003, p. 183).

What can the ideal quasi-realist say to support Gibbard and Blackburn’s replies? I am in agreement that the notion of truth Street uses is far too strong. However, even if we accept that the truth is deflationary, we must still offer Street an explanation of the agreement between Ann and Ben. When Ann and Ben express moral judgements for the ideal quasi-realist they express a match between Ideal Ann and regular Ann, or Ideal Ben and Regular Ben. Suppose they come up with their judgements separately, but end up in a moral debate one day.

During the discussion Ann thinks *x* is right, and Ben thinks *y* is right. Although they disagree substantively, they do agree there is a right course of action. The ideal quasi-realist can explain this easily. Since stable attitudes come equipped with an expression of a match between yourself and ideal you. The notion that there is a truth of the matter is an acceptance that Ann and Ben recognise that the Ideal versions of themselves can match. Ann and Ben disagree substantively, but they can still endorse the notion that once they have reflected further their ideal advisors will agree. Independent normativity, then, is simply the idea that ideal advisors can agree that there is a right thing to do in a particular situation.

## **Conclusion**

I’ve argued that Street’s argument, even if we accept Gibbard and Blackburn’s reply, still presents a problem for the quasi-realist. She still needs to explain what it is to accept the notion that there is an independent normative truth as such. A denial of vast realism denies that the truth must be inflated, but it does not speak to the independent normativity of the claim. The ideal advisor

seeks to fill in that gap and her explanation is intended to work in tandem with Gibbard's and Blackburn's quasi-realism.

## Conclusion

I've argued that the quasi-realist can defend herself from five problems: the moral attitude problem, the fundamental error problem, the revised relativism problem, the problems of metaethical neutrality, and finally, a mind-independence and evolution problem. Along the way I have defended Blackburn's view, and where necessary shown how my view can fill in some gaps in the quasi-realist explanation of moral judgements (as we've just seen in the previous chapter). But I've also shown where ideal quasi-realism departs from Blackburn, and where it can offer a better explanation than its predecessor.

There is more work to be done, and I welcome future projects where I get to explore metaethical neutrality in more depth, and where I can explore the merits of deflationary truth. These projects, however, could be independent research projects of their own. And so I touch on the first, and simply assume the latter for the sake of the analysis and argument of this thesis.

The path to arguing for ideal quasi-realism, then, has not ended with this chapter, it has only begun. Each chapter hints how an ideal quasi-realist might offer a satisfying solution to the problems it faces, but by no means does it address every issue for the quasi-realist. My hope for the future is that I'll have the opportunity to develop my view in much more detail.

My thesis has, primarily, been an investigation into the plausibility of projectivism in metaethics. Each chapter has explored problems associated with it and whether the quasi-realist can reply. I

have argued that the quasi-realist can indeed defend herself against some of the most pressing challenges to her philosophical programme.

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